

The Glorious Ministry Of The New Testament.

Text: 1 Cor 3:4-11

1) What the ministry of the New Testament is

Suggested Hymns:

2) How glorious it is

433, 408, 243, 609, 397

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 3:4–11, ⁴ *And we have such trust through Christ toward God.* ⁵ *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,* ⁶ *who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

⁷ *But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,* ⁸ *how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?*

⁹ *For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.* ¹⁰ *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.* ¹¹ *For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

If we want to understand this Epistle correctly, we must search for the reason which induced Paul to write these words to the Corinthians.

False apostles had appeared in Corinth, men that probably had come from Jerusalem and had introduced themselves with letters of approval which they had in their possession. They claimed to be Christian teachers. They preached Christ. They called themselves preachers of the Gospel. But in fact they were preachers of the Law.

They told the Christians in Corinth that they could not be received into heaven if they did not keep the Jewish ceremonial law as to meat and drink, new

moons, Sabbaths, circumcision, and the like. They endeavoured to put the yoke upon the necks of the disciples, and to deny them the liberty by which Christ has made us free.¹

No doubt, the advanced Christians in the Corinthian church withstood these false apostles, and told them that their teachings did not agree with the founder of their congregation, St. Paul. But what did the false apostles do? They had the audacity to defame the holy Apostle's character and belittle his work.

They expressed doubts as to his perfect honesty. They said among other things that *"his letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."*² Not only did they regard themselves as above the Apostle with regard to gifts and talents, but they also prided themselves with restoring the Law of God which, in their opinion, the Apostle had neglected.

Titus was one of the men who withstood these false apostles in Corinth. He travelled to Macedonia, and there met St. Paul, whom he informed of the false apostles' doings. So Paul dictated a letter to Titus to take along with him to the Corinthian congregation.

In this Second Epistle to the Corinthians he vindicates his character, refutes the charges which the false apostles had made against him, and defends his ministry.

In our text he speaks of the ministry of the New Testament, and shows how much more glorious it is than the ministry of the Old Testament which those false apostles were attempting to restore.

Let us therefore consider *The Glorious Ministry Of The New Testament*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What The Ministry Of The New Testament Is

What is the ministry of the New Testament? The ministry of the New Testament deals with a subject of which the natural man knows absolutely nothing. The Apostle says, *"⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant."*

Paul was a highly educated man, a great scholar, who had been sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most renowned teachers of his day. And what does he say of the subject with which the ministry of the New Testament deals? He says *“⁵Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves.”*

He declares his insufficiency to produce a single thought of himself as to those things which he is required to proclaim as a minister of the New Testament. What God requires of a minister in the time of the New Testament is, that he should not speak in words which human wisdom teaches, but in words which the Holy Spirit teaches, that he should not proclaim his own thoughts and ideas, his own views on religious matters, or social questions, or politics, but that he should proclaim the salvation which God has revealed in the Scripture.

It is the message of salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and of which we would know nothing whatever if God had not made it known to us in the Bible.

We are to be ministers of the New Testament, as the Apostle says, *“not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* The ministry of the New Testament is not to be a ministry of the letter.

By the letter the Apostle means the Law, and the Law in the time of the Old Testament had a wide meaning. It comprised the moral, the ceremonial, and the civil Law. He is saying, Not the Law is the governing principle in the time of the New Testament. The Law is indeed a sublime doctrine. It is God’s institution, and the moral law God wrote into man’s heart at the creation. But the time of the Law’s dominion is past.

Let those false apostles speak ever so much of Moses and of the laws which God prescribed for His people in the Old Testament. Now the time of the New Testament has come. Now the time has come of which God says in the prophecies of Jeremiah 31:31–33, ³¹ *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.*

³³ *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

And what do those false prophets accomplish who hold you down to the letter of the Law? They do not benefit you in the least, but they make you most miserable. For the letter kills, that is, the Law can save no person, but it condemns everybody, because nobody can keep the Law as it should be kept.

Well, then, does this mean that we should not preach the Law at all in the time of the New Testament? Must we exclude the Law altogether from the ministry of the New Testament? The Apostle does not mean to say that. In his Epistle to the Romans he meets this objection and says, ³¹ *Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.*"³

Also the Law of God must be proclaimed in its stringency and stern severity, not the ceremonial law, which Christ has abolished, but the moral law, which will never be out of force.

A minister of the New Testament must hold up the Law, the Ten Commandments, to his people as he would hold up a mirror, so that people look at themselves in the Law, and that even the best of his members may perceive by the Law that they are damnable sinners.

He must show them how to use the Law as a ruler that they might lead a God-pleasing life. He must show that the Law serves as a curb for the wicked to check their evil deeds.

But what is the real aim and object of the ministry of the New Testament? Is it to teach the precepts of morality? Is it to enforce the Law? Is it to teach men how to lead an honest and upright life, how to love God and the neighbour?

No; this is the great mistake of so many churches in our day, and especially of the so-called fashionable churches, that they have forgotten the real aim and object of the ministry of the New Testament, that their preachers teach shallow morality and nothing else, that they lead their people to expect heaven in compensation for the works of the Law which they perform.

No; the ministry of the New Testament is to be a ministry of the Spirit, as the Apostle says, and by the Spirit he means the Gospel. The Spirit gives life, and the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes.⁴

The aim and object of the ministry of the New Testament is, first of all, to bring people into eternal life through Christ, and to secure for them eternal salvation by the preaching of the Gospel, to show them that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, has suffered and died on the cross for their sins, and to get them to believe in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins that they may have eternal life through His name.

And when people have come to a true faith in Christ, they will be found willing to obey the Law of God which is proclaimed to them, and to walk in the commandments of the Lord, not for the sake of reward, but from thankfulness to God who gave them eternal life through Christ's great work.

2. How Glorious It Is

Having heard what the ministry of the New Testament is, namely, a ministry not of the letter, but of the Spirit, let us briefly consider how glorious it is.

By the action of those false apostles in Corinth who endeavoured to put the Christians under the Law and thereby to restore the ministry of the old dispensation, the Apostle is led to set up a comparison, and thereby to show how much more glorious the ministry of the New Testament is than that of the Old Testament, as to its effect, its teaching, and its duration.

First, as to its effect. He says, ⁷ *But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away,* ⁸ *how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?"*

The Apostle is saying, What is the effect of the Law? It is the ministry of death, for the letter kills. All that the Law can do is to frighten and to kill. How the children of Israel fled, and how they were terrified when God gave them the holy Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai!

And to this day, when the Law of God is proclaimed to you, the effect of the Law upon you will be that you will flee from God and fear His anger and wrath. Yet the Law is a divine ordinance, holy and glorious in itself.

From the glory of Moses' countenance, when he came down to them from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone on which the Commandments were written, the children of Israel could see that he had been in the presence of God. But it was a glory which was too bright to look at.⁵

Moses had to cover his face with a veil because the Israelites could not look at him steadily. Such was the glory of the Law with which the ministry of the old dispensation dealt.

How different is the glory of the Gospel with which the ministry of the New Testament deals! The Gospel is life. The Gospel removes all fear from the sinner's heart. The Gospel convinces us that with all boldness and confidence we can approach our heavenly Father as His dear children.

It is true that both the Law and the Gospel are to be proclaimed in the New Testament, but in the ministry of the New Testament the Law is like the moon, which governs the night, and shines while the world sleeps, but the Gospel is like the sun, which governs the day, and brings life and joy to the world.

Secondly, as to the teaching of the Law and of the Gospel, the Apostle says, ***“⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.”*** The Apostle applies a distinctive name to the Law and to the Gospel here. He calls the Law the ministry of condemnation. He is saying that Condemnation, and nothing but condemnation, is what the Law teaches. The Law does not tell you that you will go to heaven, but it tells you plainly that you will go to hell.

The Law tells you that you must love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbour as yourself. But if you are honest about it, can you truly say that you love God and the neighbour in such measure as the Law demands?

What, then, does the Law teach but condemnation because you have not fulfilled its precepts?

But what does the Gospel teach? It is the ministry of righteousness. It teaches righteousness. The Gospel tells you that you are righteous in the sight of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that God will not lay a single sin to your charge for the sake of His dear Son who bled and died for you on the cross.

How much more glorious, then, is the ministry of the New Testament with the Gospel and righteousness than the ministry of the Old Testament with the Law and condemnation!

Finally, as to the duration of both, the Apostle says, ¹⁰ *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.* The ministry of the old dispensation is a thing of the past. It was done away with when Christ came. The temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and all things which pertained to the ceremonial law prefigured and foreshadowed Christ. These institutions were glorious for the time being. God's chosen people found in them their soul's delight.

But all their glory was eclipsed when Christ came, who is the Sun of Righteousness. And they had to cease altogether. The temple is gone, the sacrifices are no more, the Old Testament priesthood is abolished, and the days of the Law's dominion over God's people are over.

But the ministry of the New Testament with the Gospel shall remain to the end of the world, and the things which are imparted to us by the preaching of the Gospel, the heavenly treasures, are of an eternal duration.

Let the enemies of Christ scoff as much as they please, and poke all manner of fun at the true Christians because they do not advance with the times, and still believe the old, antiquated Gospel.

Let them predict that the Gospel will soon be cast aside as old iron, and that in a few years no intelligent person will believe in what they call the miracles of the Bible.

Such predictions have been made since the earliest time of the Christian Church. And yet the Gospel has always held its own, and even the gates of hell could not prevail against the Church of Christ. And so the Gospel will always remain, and there will always be a Church of true believers.

Blessed is he who is a member of this invisible Church. *The Word of the Lord endures forever.*⁶ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Galatians 5:1

² 2 Corinthians 10:10

³ Romans 3:31

⁴ Romans 1:16

⁵ Exodus 31:18

⁶ 1 Peter 1:25