

The Glory Of The New Covenant

“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look stedfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away; how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit be with glory? For if the ministration of condemnation hath glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect by reason of the glory that surpasseth. For if that which passeth away was with glory, much rather that which remaineth is in glory” (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

The apostle speaks of three things which had glory: the first covenant, the second covenant, and Moses' face. When Moses was in God's presence receiving God's law, his face shone exceedingly, making it difficult for Israel to look on it. So, he put a veil upon his face when instructing Israel, but he removed it when he returned to God's presence to receive His further commands for Israel (Ex. 34:33-35). How long this brightness remained on Moses' face is not revealed in the scriptures: some ancient Jewish teachers taught that if it were possible to locate Moses' tomb today and open it, the glory of his face would still brighten the darkness — but that is just Jewish lore. The glory of Moses' face was passing away but the veil Moses covered it with concealed the fading of that glory from Israel.

This event of the glory of Moses' face and his covering it when he spoke with Israel serves Paul in teaching a valuable lesson, just as his earlier letter to the Galatians his allegory of Abraham and his two wives and sons served to teach a similar truth about the two covenants (Gal. 4:21-31).

There was brightness (glory) on Moses face. In verse 7 of this chapter Paul speaks of this glory, adding “which glory was passing away” which naturally leads to the question: what is he referring to in this statement — the glory on Moses' face or the glory of the first covenant? Literally, the glory on Moses' face was passing away, but since the apostle uses the glory of Moses' face to illustrate the glory of the law, symbolically it was the glory of the law which was passing away. And, because Moses had a veil on his face and Israel could not thus see when that glory faded away, Paul wrote, “But their minds were hardened: for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth, it not being revealed to them that it is done away in Christ. But unto this day, whosoever Moses is read, a veil lieth on their heart” (2 Cor. 3:14f). The inability of Israel to see the fading glory on Moses' face symbolically pictured the inability of Israel to see the passing away of the first covenant: they had a veil on their heart.

The first covenant did come with glory. Not only was it a terrifying event and scene, the very nature of that covenant was and is a basis for the morality God always requires of men created in His image. Yet the New Covenant exceeds the glory of that first covenant, if for no other reason than that it remains while the first is gone. Yet, that is not the only reason the New Covenant may properly lay claim to possessing more glory than the first. Jesus contrasts the Old and New Covenant in His sermon on the mount

— read particularly Matthew 5:21-48. One would be amiss to say that the first covenant was wholly “external” — it wasn’t, for the heart was involved: “Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ...” (Dt. 6:5), yet one would also be amiss if he denied that the greater emphasis of the first covenant was external. And, the greatest contrast of all is that forgiveness under the first covenant was temporary, just “stop gap” until Christ, with his New Covenant should provide effective blood to permanently remit sin. Such is the character of that New Covenant.

Thus “but whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3:16). A footnote to the “it” in the verse supplies “a man shall turn” which is the thought, yet when “it” — the heart on which the veil lays — turns to the Lord, sincerely seeking to know, to do God’s will, the veil is removed. Thus one sees that the temporary, transitory nature of the Old Covenant, although glorious, is inferior to the New Covenant whose glory is permanent. Jeremiah wrote, “And ye shall seek for me, and ye shall find me, when ye shall seek for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

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