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# The Preaching in the New Covenant

## 2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6

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### **Introduction**

Illustration: a medical practice – theory, training, person and then the reality of the practice of the ministry.

Paul locates all ministry in the church as a ministry of the New Covenant. The following key features show the heart-orientation embedded in that ministry.

<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who 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.

### **A ministry of the Spirit, not the letter of the Old (v.6)**

<sup>6</sup> who 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.

Our approach to grow and change is now a matter of the Word and Spirit in a new and transforming way.

### **A ministry full of greater glory than the Old (v.7-11)**

<sup>7</sup> Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, <sup>8</sup> will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? <sup>9</sup> For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. <sup>10</sup> Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. <sup>11</sup> For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

True New Covenant ministry will have a distinct glory about it. As it works to help people grow and change, it will be God-centered and God-magnifying.

### **A ministry that unveils the fading glory of the Old (v.12-16)**

<sup>12</sup> Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

New Covenant ministry will help people to live by and in the New Covenant and not to return to the Old as a way of life.

### **A ministry that transforms in a Christ-centered way (v.17-18)**

<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

New Covenant ministry affirms the transforming power of beholding Christ and therefore will hold him up to people's gaze and will rest in that transforming work. Our hearts will become like what the gaze at.

### **A ministry that gives freedom from the slavery of the old (v.17-18)**

<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

New Covenant ministry will free people from heart and behavior slavery both to the Old and to what the Old could never set us free from.

### **A ministry that is exercised with godly integrity (4:1-6)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

New Covenant ministry exemplifies godliness in its exercise while expecting heart transformation. There will be no disconnect from the way the ministry works from what is expected of people in their Christian lives.

How we do ministry and the way we go about it are profoundly affected by the glory of the ministry of the New Covenant.

### **The Conduct of our Ministry (v.2)**

<sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

That we have received this kind of ministry impacts the way we do the ministry we have received. It affects the conduct and the methods we employ. Paul's language is clear in what he rejects and what he embraces. This is so because it is precisely at these points that his opponents, the so-called "super-apostles" are corrupting the ministry of the Word.

There will be *no deception* in life and ministry. Paul has thoroughly rejected shamefully deceptive ways of ministering. This is the temptation of the evangelical. They resort to manipulation, propaganda and reliance on the methods of the world in serving Christ.

There will be *no distortion* of truth in ministry. Paul has determined not to conduct ministry in such a way that it mixes it with foreign elements. The allusion is to the practice of taking good wine and mixing it with water and selling it as the genuine, full article. This is the temptation to the liberal. They twist and distort the gospel or present a partial gospel. They mix the truth with foreign elements so you can have today the prosperity gospel, or the social gospel or the therapeutic gospel.

In contrast, there will be *a full and complete disclosure* of truth that commends itself to in others conscience and before the face of God. This must be the full commitment of each of you, not just the elders. Each of you must give your life and whatever ministry God gives you to a full disclosure of the truth of the Word of God. You must reject the world's methods and their deceptions. And you must reject the distortions and twisting of Scripture that keep us comfortable and accepted among our peers.

Why do these things become a temptation to us? Because of...

### **The Challenge in our Ministry**

**(v.3-4)**

<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

One of the great struggles in each sphere of the church's purpose is that people don't get it. In our exaltation, people can sing without heart and passion and engagement. In our edification, we can preach and teach and apply and people can be apathetic, disobedient and utterly self-serving. And in our evangelism, people don't respond to the great danger of God's wrath and judgment and to the great provision in the gospel. So we become frustrated and discouraged and turn to things that work.

Paul says that we must understand that the god of this world, Satan, is actively blinding unbelievers so that they cannot see the light. The fact of their blindness does not deny the presence or the power of the light. The sun does not go away because you cannot see. So while Moses veiled himself so that Israel would not see the fading glory, Satan blinds the unbelieving today so that the ever-present and brightness of glory is veiled to them.

And what a gospel it is that we have to proclaim. It is "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (v.4b). The gospel involves the facts of the doing and dying of the Savior. It is about His resurrection and our salvation. The good news is ultimately about the glory of Christ. The facts of the gospel are to the glory of the gospel like the facts of atomic fission and sun spots and gravity are to the brightness and power and the energy flowing from the sun.

So how do these truths affect Paul's understanding of ministry? It shapes...

**The Concepts for our Ministry****(v.5-6)**

<sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I see two powerfully important ideas that are central to not losing heart in the glorious ministry of the gospel to a blinded and dead world.

There is the centrality of *the supremacy of Christ* (v.5). The core sentence here is that "we preach Christ Jesus as Lord." That we do so means that the focus is not on us except as bond-servants. The glory of Christ in the gospel is His supremacy – that is, that He is Lord. Not that He is just Divine, but that He is sole and absolute Lord who is to be worshipped, loved, trusted and obeyed. So we constantly shine the light of our preaching on Christ and stand in the shadows as servants.

There is the centrality of *the sovereignty of God* (v.6). Now this is where we must tell the whole truth. And here it is. We do not lose heart in ministry because that people see the light of the knowledge the glory of God is utterly dependent upon a sovereign work of God. Now don't miss this. God sovereignly speaks and light is created to shine in the darkness, so God sovereignly shines in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. O how I love these verses. O, to gaze on the magnificent glory of the eternal God by looking on the countenance of Christ with God given faith now and someday with real, physical sight. But that we see is utterly of God.

So here it is. The glory is great. The blindness is perverse and pervasive. But Jesus is supreme and God is sovereign and the good news is glorious.

But here is the root of so much discouragement. "We have this glorious treasure of light and life in earthen vessels, in frail and failing jars of clay" (v.7). So we must not lose heart...

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**Reflect and Respond**

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?

Your thoughts...

Your struggles...

Your questions...

Your changes...