

The True Glory Of The New Testament Ministry.

Text: 2 Cor 3:4-11

Suggested Hymns:
245, 263, 232, 243, 247

- 1) In its origin — it is God's institution
- 2) In Its Message, The Most Joyous Ever Heard On Earth
- 3) In its blessed effects for time and eternity

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,

In this text we find Paul on the defensive. He had been attacked because he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ with so much freedom and in such fullness. The teachers of Judaism had tried to mislead the Christians at Corinth by suggesting that Paul was not to be trusted because he made too little of the Law of Moses.

In order to lend weight to their charges, these false teachers had spread all manner of slander against Paul. They had not hesitated even to refer to his bodily

presence as contemptible. Thus Paul was made to look like his Master, Jesus, whom His enemies called a ‘glutton and a winebibber.’

However, Paul knew very well that these attacks upon him were in reality and chiefly directed, not so much against his person as against his office and work. Therefore he defends himself by unfolding to the Corinthians the exceeding glory of his office as a preacher of the New Testament Gospel, and these words of defence have been preserved for us that we should heed them.

God wants us to be impressed with the glory of the New Testament ministry. He has instituted this ministry so that through it He might bless us. Let us therefore also attentively follow the words of St. Paul in this text as he unfolds to us *The True Glory of the New Testament Ministry*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. This Glory Of The New Testament Ministry Consists In Its Origin — It Is God’s Institution

The true minister of the New Testament does not run or come of his own accord. Our text says, ⁵ *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves.* We read in Jeremiah 23:21, ²¹ *“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.*

Nor does he invent his own message.¹ He does not prophesy his own dreams.² We read in Galatians 1:11-12, ¹¹ *But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.* ¹² *For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The Bible warns us against false teachers in Deuteronomy 13:3, ³ *“you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

It is the glory of the New Testament ministry that it was instituted by God and brings us an authoritative message from God. Our text says, *our sufficiency is from God.* Paul again and again insists upon his divine call and upon his divine message³ as we learn in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, ¹⁹ *God was in Christ*

reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

In their origin, the glory of the Old Testament ministry and the glory of the New Testament ministry are equal. They both have the same divine origin. The Jews boasted of the Law of Moses that was given by God Himself on Mount Sinai. That constituted its glory. Paul did not deny this. He admitted it, but he also claimed the same glory for his Gospel and his ministry. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament come from God.

In the Old Testament the New Testament truths were veiled, but in the New Testament this veil was lifted. But the majority of the Jews refused to have the veil lifted.

Let us be grateful for this glory of the New Testament ministry. It is not the invention of men, which fascinates man's weakened reason. No, it originates in God. God has instituted the New Testament ministry, and He has given the New Testament pastor his message, just as Jesus said to His disciples in John 20:21, *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

2. This Glory Of The New Testament Ministry Consists

In Its Message, The Most Joyous Message Ever Heard On Earth

But Paul is not just satisfied to tell the Corinthians that the New Testament Covenant has the same glory as the Old Testament Covenant because they both have the same origin.

In our text he calls attention to the fact that the ministry of the Spirit is rather more glorious and by far exceeds the Old Testament ministry for the reason that its message is much more glorious.

This message is not Law. That was the message from Mt. Sinai. And it is true, the great Moral Law of God published from Sinai is brilliant with glory because it is true and because it leads man on the right path because it expresses

God's will concerning our life. It shows us the image into which God is to transform us. We are thankful for this pure Law of God.

We rejoice that our pastors teach it in its truth and purity. And yet this Law has its terror because it continually reminds us of our sins, of our debts toward God, and of our offences.

The New Testament ministry brings a message of far greater glory. In our text St. Paul calls it *the ministry of the Spirit*. The Law given by God in the Old Testament was known to some extent to men before God revealed it from Mount Sinai.

However, the Gospel-message in its New Testament fullness was known to no one until the Holy Spirit revealed it.⁴ We read in 1 Corinthians 2:11-15, *"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

What glad tidings that Gospel brings to us! We read in 1 Timothy 1:15, ¹⁵ *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* And 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, ¹⁸ *Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*⁵

If today a perfect cure for total blindness was discovered, what joy would thrill the nations! And yet the great majority of people on this earth do not need such a cure at all.

But here in the message of the New Testament ministry there is proclaimed help for all people without distinction and for all troubles, a help that is permanent.

No wonder that David exclaimed,⁶ *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.* ² *Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

No wonder that John cries out,⁷ ¹ *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*

It was this message that caused the angels to sing,⁸ *“Glory to God in the highest!”* It was this message that caused the Lord Jesus to give thanks to His heavenly Father in those wonderful words, as written in Matthew 11:25, *“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.”*

It is the content of the Gospel that causes St. Paul again and again in his letters to break forth in such doxologies as the following, ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*⁹ And in Ephesians 3:2,1 ²¹ *to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.*

It is this message that sets the whole Christian Church, young and old, to sing our beautiful hymns. Truly, the New Testament ministry has a far more exceeding glory than that of the Old Testament, where these precious truths were still veiled, although they were made known through images, emblems, types, and shadows.

3. This Glory Of The New Testament Ministry Consists In Its Blessed Effects For Time And Eternity

But there is still another glory of this New Testament ministry mentioned by St. Paul in our text.

It is not the ministry of condemnation. That was the glory of the Law given by Moses. It condemned all wickedness. St. Paul in our text calls this revelation from Sinai *“the letter,”* because the Law was engraved upon stone, fixed and permanent, and testified against all men.

It was glorious in its truth, glorious in its origin, but in itself it meant death and condemnation for all people, for the Law condemns us all. Not so the

Gospel. Of Christ we are told in John 3:17, ¹⁷ ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Jesus said of Himself that “the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”***

Next, Paul points out that it is the exceeding glory, the greater glory, of the New Testament ministry to bring righteousness to men. Our text says, ***the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.***

And this religion of grace through Jesus Christ, which the Holy Spirit has revealed to us, brings forgiveness of sins, grace, mercy, and pardon to all penitent sinners, and thus kindles faith in their heart, which makes them children of God.

God’s Holy Spirit begins His work through this New Testament ministry in our hearts and thus produces ***the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control.***

It is the ministry of righteousness. All the fruits produced by preaching the Gospel testify to the glory of the New Testament ministry, the glory of the Gospel in its fullness and righteousness.

So today we have once more been told of the glory of the ministry through which God has blessed us also here in our congregation. We hear a message which comes from God, a message which tells us of God’s great love for us poor, lost sinners, a message which transforms us into children of God, renews in us more and more the image of God, and will finally restore to us perfectly God’s image of knowledge, righteousness, and blessedness.

Oh, let us rejoice in this gift of God, let us thank Him for it, and let us do our utmost that it may be preserved future generations! Amen.

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

¹ 1 Cor. 1:21a; 1 Cor. :2:8-9

² Jer. 23:32

³ Gal. 1:12b; 1 Cor. 2:12-13

⁴ See also John 3:13-16; John 1:18

⁵ See also Gal. 4:4-7

⁶ Psa. 32:1-2

⁷ 1 John 3:1

⁸ Luke 2:14

⁹ 2 Corinthians 9:15