

The New Covenant

This is one of the areas of biblical understanding that has so many **negative effects on other areas of belief** if we don't get it right. **How we interpret these words from Paul we'll decide as we view the proper use of the Old Testament including the law of Moses.** This will also affect our view on **Jesus' return, or end times.** There's much writing on how we handle these verses.

This is the classic old school versus New School argument.

A good study would be to mark every reference to old and new. Make **lists** of what Paul is saying about the **old way versus the new way.** Also mark all the **references to glory.** See what you can learn.

⁷The **old way**, with **laws etched in stone, led to death**, though it **began with such glory** that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was **already fading away.** (**What is this about?** We must go **back in time** to find out. Here's the transition from old to new.) ⁸Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under **the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life?** ⁹If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the **new way**, which makes us right with God! ¹⁰In fact, that **first glory** was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the **new way.** ¹¹So if the **old way**, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is **the new, which remains forever!**

¹²Since this **new way** gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. ¹⁴But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the **old covenant** is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. ¹⁵Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.

¹⁶But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷For the Lord is the Spirit, and **wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.** ¹⁸So all of us who have had that veil removed can **see and reflect the glory of the Lord.** And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Let's look back to when the whole idea of a covenant between God and people first started. A covenant is a **binding contract** between God and **the family of Abraham, which later became the nation of Israel.** God cannot break his part of the contract. The **only question is will the people keep their end of the bargain, or will they break the covenant.**

Here's a quick breakdown of the Covenant with Abraham and then with Moses on Mt. Sinai.

- I will be your God and you will be my special people.
- I will make you a great nation.
- I will give you a homeland that is good.

- I will make you a **blessing to all the nations...examples of how to know and please God.**
- You will be **exclusively mine, completely** faithful to obey what I say.

Because Paul is referring to the covenant from the time of Moses, we will read a little bit **from that time period** to give you an idea of what Paul is trying to say. **Exodus 34:29** and following says... When Moses came down Mount Sinai carrying the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, he wasn't aware that **his face had become radiant because he had spoken to the Lord.** ³⁰ So when Aaron and the people of Israel saw the radiance of Moses' face, **they were afraid to come near him.** ³¹ But Moses called out to them and asked Aaron and all the leaders of the community to come over, and he talked with them. ³² Then all the people of Israel approached him, and Moses gave them all the instructions the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses finished speaking with them, **he covered his face with a veil.** ³⁴ But whenever he went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he would remove the veil until he came out again. Then he would give the people whatever instructions the Lord had given him, ³⁵ and **the people of Israel would see the radiant glow of his face.** So he would **put the veil over his face until he returned to speak with the Lord.** Exodus 34:29-35

The glory or goodness of God is so powerful that Moses' face glows from being in his presence. **And only he can be in God's presence** in the tabernacle and speak directly to Yahweh.

But why would he want to hide that behind a veil? I would think seeing that would **encourage the people to worship** and follow their God, who is this powerful, as **well as to listen to Moses, his messenger.**

If we are to understand what Paul is saying about the need for a new covenant, we must look a little closer at this old covenant.

When we look at The Old Covenant we need to go back to the beginning to discover **what went wrong making a new covenant necessary.**

A new covenant is needed **because the first one failed in its purpose. The old covenant...1. Failed to produce the "Kingdom of priests."**

That's an unusual phrase, kingdom of priests. That's a lot of priests. **And what do priests do?** They help people to **connect with their God** and **worship in a way that he deserves because of his glory and goodness.**

That phrase might **sound strange,** but **it's straight out of Exodus.** ⁵ Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom **of priests,** my holy **nation.** This is the message you must give to the people **of Israel.**" Exodus 19:5-6

Are you getting the picture? If the whole world is God's and he desires for them all to worship him and be in a relationship with him, then that's why he needs a whole kingdom of priests. The purpose of the nation of Israel was to **now be an example to all people** to love and be in relationship with the one true God, **who is good and glorious.**

The nation of Israel, from the journey out of Egyptian captivity to the promised land, to the kingdoms of David and Solomon, up to the days of Jesus had failed to be that example. They couldn't keep the basic tenant of the Covenant **to remain completely and exclusively God's by following him obediently.** Therefore, they **could not be an example.** They **couldn't lead anyone** to a relationship with God because they couldn't find the way themselves.

Ultimately the old covenant **failed to produce the "kingdom of priests"...**2. Because they were stiff necked, hard hearted.

These are two descriptors the Bible uses to help us understand the basis of this failure of Israel to be "a Kingdom of priests."

Here's what the book of **Hebrews says** from the New Testament. **But the people's minds were hardened**, and to this day whenever **the old covenant** is being read, the same **veil covers their minds** so they cannot understand the truth. Notice how the veil keeps them from understanding and knowing God. They can't see his goodness and glory. And **this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.** That is why the **Holy Spirit says**, "Today when you hear his voice, ⁸ don't **harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled**, when they tested me in the wilderness. ⁹ There your ancestors **tested and tried my patience, even though they saw my miracles for forty years.** Hebrews 3:7-9

Did you notice that last verse? It tells the whole story. Their minds and hearts were hard and **couldn't receive** what God was about. The proof was that they tested and tried God's patience. **Even though they saw his goodness and glory in the miracles**, they didn't obey him. He gave them **manna from heaven** and **water from a rock.**

A soft heart can receive what God is saying and doing. A soft heart can soak that in. Like a sponge, not like a rock. If you spill something, you don't grab a rock to try to capture all that liquid. **"Quick honey, I spilled my coffee. Give me that chunk of granite over there. It's not working!"**

So, what about them being stiff necked? Again from Exodus..."I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a **stiff-necked** people. Exodus 32:9

When you have a stiff neck, that means **you don't turn your head toward God and his path** for you. **The head must turn to change direction.** The **rest of the body will follow.** Those who are stiff necked **find it hard to repent** because repentance is a 180-degree change of direction. **If the head doesn't turn, the eyes cannot find the path.**

Let's add this up. They cannot absorb or **take in who God is and what he is saying.** They **cannot change our course correctly, behavior correctly after hearing** God's direction from his messenger, Moses.

The old covenant failed to produce an example to the rest of the nations because Israel was **hard hearted and stiff necked**, by not keeping their end of the covenant...Therefore, Moses brings the law as a go between.

They needed a mediator between God and them or God would destroy them for their disobedience. That's Moses.

This **brings us back to the glowing face of Moses that needed to be veiled** and the book of Exodus as it describes how the old covenant was established. How Moses was their **mediator in bringing the law to them.**

First, in the desert by Mt. Sinai they broke the covenant both literally and physically. When Moses was up on the mountain with God, they desired to make **a golden calf.** Bad idea. When Moses came down from being in the very presence of God and saw what they were doing he threw the stone tablets on the ground, breaking them. **The people “broke” the covenant by making an image of God, Moses broke the covenant tablets for that reason.**

In Exodus 34 the Covenant is renewed by second giving of 10 commandments, **but Israel’s hearts remain hardened and necks stiff.** Israel **doesn’t do much better, but Moses** doesn’t break them this time.

The veil Moses uses from that point on is because they cannot handle God’s glory because of their sinfulness.

- **Only Moses** was able to enter the presence of God.
- His face needed to be **veiled.**
- **Continued separation in the tabernacle and Temple** between the people and God’s glory.

All of this expresses the need for a new covenant.

What about that phrase, “brightness was already **fading away.**” **This Greek word is hard to translate.** Fading away **gives the impression that he had to go back and get recharged.** No, the intent of this word is to mean that **because of their sinfulness, they could not look at Moses’ face continually** without being destroyed because of their sinfulness...” **which was being rendered inoperative.”**

The fact that Moses needs a veil is because what he brings to the people is not life, but death. He is announcing God’s judgment!

Moses needed a veil because the covenant didn't work. It was broken just as the tablets were broken. **Only because Moses was the go between could Israel and their sinfulness survive. Therefore, Moses must wear a veil or he, as their leader, becomes a danger to them.**

The laws that Moses brought were also a way to place **a different kind of veil** between the glorious goodness of God and the sinful hard-hearted stiff necked the people of Israel. **The law in a similar way brought judgment because it made their sinfulness visible.** So, the many **rules and regulations** within the law **pronounced judgment,** but mediated the punishment of death. **This is most obvious in the sacrificial system** used in the Tabernacle and then the temple.

Now that we have diagnosed the disease with the old covenant or the old way of relating to God, we see the need for **the remedy...**The New Covenant.

What makes this new covenant different, effective, superior.

The new Covenant...1. Is more glorious because it brings life, not judgment and death.

The old covenant is ineffective and broken because it does not allow God's people to experience his presence.

Let's look back at **2nd Corinthians 3** verses 8 and 9.⁸ Shouldn't we expect **far greater glory** under **the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life?**⁹ If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the **new way**, which makes us right with God! 2 Corinthians 3:8-9

Look at that phrase in verse 8 that says the new way now that the Holy Spirit is giving life. **Why does the new covenant bring life?** That's very simple because **there is no go between, no mediator.** God in the form of **his Holy Spirit**, therefore, can bring life because now there is **no need for someone like Moses to enter God's presence** on our behalf or a system of rules **to appease for a time the judgment that comes from the law.**

We use the phrase almost **every time we do communion together** that the new covenant means that **God now takes up residence** in his people. **He's no longer in a Tabernacle or temple where there is a go between who mediates God's glorious goodness to us in small enough doses that we can tolerate it.**

Now because of Jesus' death, it is possible for God to dwell amid his people without destroying them, thereby, bringing about their righteousness.

Back in verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 3... we see Paul setting up all that we have written with these words. ⁶He has enabled us to be **ministers of his new covenant.** This is a covenant not of **written laws, but of the Spirit.** The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:6

Paul is saying that he is like Moses in that he is **bringing God's words to the people.** The difference is that **Paul doesn't need a veil, nor does he need the written law.** It is all **about the spirit.** The Holy Spirit comes directly to the people even when someone brings the words of truth.

Now because of faith in Jesus our hearts are softened and our necks become relaxed and loose. That means...2. We can turn toward God without fear of punishment and death.

As God's new people we can turn toward Gods' face, his glorious goodness, and not fear that because we are sinful, he will punish us with the death our sin warrants. **We don't fear rejection anymore.** There is **no veil hiding God** in his fullness. **We see him by looking at Jesus, the one that made us able to qualify for this new and better covenant relationship.**

¹⁶But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 2 Corinthians 3:16

Here's the thing for us. The **enemy wants you to believe** that you, because of **your past or your feelings of shame**, you need a veil. You aren't worthy of God's love. That is a lie. **You are worthy because you are loved and because Jesus removed your guilt** from between you and God. **Are you going to put it back?**

This belief will keep you from experiencing what God wants to say to you **through the Bible.** It will be a **closed book.** It will **keep a veil between** you and others within the body of Christ. Now

there will be something **between the kind of relationships that God wants** to use to bring you healing and freedom.

Why isn't the Bible or Church working for you? Maybe you have **allowed a veil** between you and God's presence in the Bible and his body the church.

The presence of God no longer brings Judgment to me. It isn't a constant reminder of how I fall short. It brings life, life that is full.

Not only are we able to turn toward God without fear of punishment and death; now when we are turned toward him, **we are remade or made new**...3. Facing God's glory now brings transformation.

This is what was **intended from the beginning. God wanted to be amid the people of Israel so that he could transform them into that nation of priests.** We were intended to enjoy God's presence as he transforms us **more and more into someone like Jesus.**

¹⁷For the Lord is the Spirit, and **wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.** ¹⁸So all of us who have had that veil removed can **see and reflect the glory of the Lord.** And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us **more and more like him** as we are changed into his **glorious image.** 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

We are now free in that we are free from the written law and the old covenant that could do nothing more than bring judgment and death. **But we are not simply free from something, we are free to something.** We are free to **become the person that God created us to be.** And this brings us **back to the original purpose of the first covenant** for God; do you have any special people who are **living examples** of how to be in relationship with him and please him?

Now God has a Kingdom of priests who are able to bring people into his glorious presence. 4. Leads to the church being God's new creation.

Paul says this very thing to a group of young Christians in Galatia. This group was struggling with whether the growing number of **gentile Christians needed to submit to the laws of Moses from the old covenant.** Laws like **circumcision.** ¹⁵It doesn't matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we have been **transformed into a new creation.** ¹⁶May God's peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle; they are **the new people of God.** Galatians 6:15-16
We are transformed into the new creation.

That takes us back to the very beginning in the garden of Eden where they walked with God in intimacy, no hiding, no fear and no shame. It also takes us **back to the people of Israel** who were God's special people, **but now with no veil to go between.**

So, what do we as a new creation, the new people of God, the **new Israel, do? We proclaim that this is our story.** ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

We say goodbye to and shut the door on the old covenant that did nothing more than keep us from being destroyed by God's powerful goodness and glory. **We have something better and that**

is a new covenant where the spirit needs no go between, and we are recreated and do something new that is becoming more and more like Jesus.

Keeping the New Covenant **Means we live as if we know who we are.** We are **confident in our status as new creations**; those being made new by the spirit.

Embrace and celebrate your identity as a new creation.

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Rebuke the enemy who would tell you that you need a veil.

¹²Since this **new way** gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. 2 Corinthians 3:12-13

God wants us to begin our advent celebration by affirming who we are because of Jesus. This is our **true identity**. It's not **my opinion or my mom's**. Mine is too harsh, mom's is too soft.

Trusting Jesus means trusting what he says about you. Celebrate this Christmas in everything you do as a reminder that **you don't need a veil; you need to rest in his presence.**