

May 24, 2009 2 Cor. 3:7-11 “Glory: Movin’ On Up” by Richard Boatman

⁷Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not gaze steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ⁹If the ministry that condemns is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! ¹⁰For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. ¹¹And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Mark Seward, a farmer and member of our congregation likes hot French fries. This made it all the more frustrating when two trips through an Ankeny, Iowa McDonald’s drive through garnered cold fries. The discovery of the cold potato sticks would be made a mile or two down the road when driving towards an appointment. Mark had had it. On his third trip to McDonalds in as many days, Mark responded to the attendant: “I’d like a Big Mac, *cold* fries and a pop.” There was an awkward pause. The attendant said, “We don’t serve cold fries.” Mark said, “Well you have the last two nights.” Then he proceeded to share some other keen insights and sage wisdom with the attendant that we won’t take time to go into.

Like Mark, most of us want things that are supposed to be hot, to be hot. Dad would say to my mom, “I want my coffee hot just like my women.” The Old Testament or Covenant had grown cold. It came with glorious heat as God wrote into stone tablets the Ten Commandments with the fire of his presence. In the subsequent years as Moses communed with the Almighty, the great leader’s face would emanate such glory that the people were afraid to come near him. He would cover his face to lessen the intensity until the glory faded.

So Paul is saying that the Law, that came through Moses but brought death because of the weakness of human nature, still came with great glory from God. And if this fading covenant came with such glory, what about the ministry of the Spirit—will it not “be even more glorious?”

The ministry of the Holy Spirit refers to a change in reference from the Law’s external mandates to the internal governing of the presence of God. This is what the disciples had been instructed to wait upon: “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city [of Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Acts 2:4 is then the beginning of this fulfillment: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

The first covenant had been written in stone. The second covenant was now written upon the heart. The prophet Jeremiah describes this new covenant of the Spirit:

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest...” (31:33-34).

Jeremiah offers for us a picture of God’s presence governing our inward lives. But what does that really mean? How does the old covenant of external mandates really differ with the new covenant of the Spirit’s internal control? Theologian and scholar Dallas Willard gives six comparisons found just in Matthew chapter 5: **1)** Irritation with one’s associates (vv. 21-26): **Old** – Don’t murder them; **New** – Desire to help them, free of anger and contempt. **2)** Sexual attraction (vv. 27-30): **Old** – No physical act; **New** – No cultivation of lust; deal with it when it’s still just in the mind. **3)** Unhappiness with one’s marriage partner (vv. 31-32): **Old** – If you divorce, give them a “pink slip.” **New** – Don’t divorce except in the case of infidelity. **4)** Really wanting someone to believe something (vv. 33-37): **Old** – Keep your vows or oaths made to convince them; **New** – Only say how things are or are not. Don’t use verbal manipulation. **5)** Being personally injured (vv. 38-42): **Old** – Inflict exactly the same injury on the offender; **New** – Don’t harm, but help the one who has damaged you. **6)** Having an enemy (vv. 43-48): **Old** – Hate your enemy; **New** – Love and bless your enemy.

Notice that the new covenant, far from giving us a free behavioral pass, actually raises the standard. I can almost hear the mental cogs turning and people saying to themselves, “I can’t do that” or “I’ve already failed most of those things.” But even those thoughts betray an old covenant way of thinking. Under the new covenant, we recognize our inability to be good enough in our own strength. But we also recognize that Jesus was strong enough. He sacrificed for our inabilities and sins and rose in power that we might now be recipients of his grace. Remember, the resurrection was not the climax but the beginning of what Jesus was doing.

Listen again to two related verses from Romans 5:21 & 8:29: “So that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Putting the emphases of these verses together we find this: *Grace rules our interior lives through the gift of righteousness that grants God a free hand in forming and shaping us into Christ’s likeness, living out our call to be brothers and sisters of the firstborn One.* C. S. Lewis puts it this way: “The command ‘Be ye perfect’ is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. God is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command.”

It is the gift of righteousness, i.e. right standing with God in and through Christ that makes us into creatures that can “come boldly to the throne of grace that we

may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). And it is grace working through this gift of righteousness that causes us to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds” (Romans 12:2).

Jada is the baby of our grandchildren. She calls me Poppie and likes to talk to me on the phone. But there is a problem. Jada only has a few words in her linguistic arsenal: Hi Poppie; Bye Poppie; Look; No, me; and, of course, potty. I love her to pieces, but let’s face it: our ability to communicate is somewhat limited by a seven to ten word vocabulary. One of last week’s daily lectionary readings was from Hebrews 5:11-14: *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are dull of hearing. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Can you sense the disappointment in the voice of this author? There is so much he wants to explain, so much depth he wants to share, but he is limited by their dulled spiritual appetite and vocabulary. It’s one thing for a two year old to have a limited word bank, but when people who have been in Christ for years are still trying to get by with the equivalent of *Poppie; Look; No, me, and potty*, we’ve got serious problems.

The Jeffersons, the popular sitcom running from 1975-1985 had a soul-style theme song called “Movin’ on Up.” The refrain announced, “Well we're Movin' on Up!/
To the east side!/
Movin' on Up!/
To a deluxe apartment in the sky /
We're movin' on up!/
To the east side!/
We've finally got a piece of the pie!

Well, the glory of God is calling us to “move on up” from the Old Covenant that has faded to the new covenant in Jesus Christ. But too many of us want to stay in the spiritual nurseries hanging on to our bottles and fighting over the stuffed animals. “I don’t like stuff too deep.” “Oh, that takes too long to read.” “I’m just too busy.” “I don’t understand the Bible.” “I’d rather do other things.” “My attention span is too short.” “We just like to fellowship.” These are just some of the things I’ve heard over the years. Multiply these by hundreds or thousands and you can see why we’re still addicted to the bottle.

My oak desk at home came from my neighbor Mrs. Bradley’s attic. It had five coats of paint on it. We applied paint remover, scraped it, sanded it, varnished it and screwed it back together. The beauty that we now see came at a price, particularly if the wood could speak. Scraped, sanded, varnished and fixed. But it was worth it. Growth in Christ comes at a price. Grace does not mean easy. Like

stripping that desk, movin' on up, being formed into Christ's image involves giving up the bottle, increasing our spiritual appetite and vocabulary and being shaped into his image. It comes at the price of obedience. And the opportunities for growth occur through everything that comes into our lives each day. While God doesn't cause it all, God uses it all—the good, the bad, and the ugly to perfect us.

There was once a Canadian bird that decided he didn't want to fly south for the winter. He decided that long flight was nonsense when he could stay right where he was. So he stayed behind. Well, after awhile it got cold. Finally, he could take it no more and decided to fly south after all. As he was flying, ice began to form on his wings to the point where he could no longer stay airborne; so he glided down and landed in a barnyard. He was half frozen and at the point of death. About that time along came a cow that walked up to the bird, straddled it and dropped a "plop" on top of him. Now the bird is really disgusted. He was half frozen, dying, and now he had this "plop" on him. After a short time though, the ice began to melt off of the bird as he started to warm up under that "plop." He began thinking to himself, "It's getting warm. I'm going to live! I'm going to live!" Right there underneath that "plop" he started to sing little bird songs. He was happy once again. But about that time a cat came along and heard this noise coming from underneath the "plop." He moved the "plop" off and ate the bird. There are three morals to the story: **1.** Not everyone who drops a "plop" on you is necessarily your enemy. **2.** Not everyone who moves it off of you is necessarily your friend. **3.** And if a "plop" is dropped on you, keep your mouth closed.

God uses the good, the bad and the ugly—yes, even the “plops” that come into our lives—to keep us grounded and moving in his grace and glory. God will use the good, the bad and the ugly to wean us from the bottle and whet our appetite for something more—what Paul calls God's “surpassing glory.” How's that sound to you? By our Lord's grace, let's move on up to the surpassing glory that is ours in Christ Jesus.