

CHAPTER VII.

**THE NEW COVENANT:
A MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT**

“Ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tables of stone, but on tables that are hearts of flesh . . . Our sufficiency is of God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. For if the ministration of death came with glory, how shall not rather the ministration of the Spirit be with glory? For if the ministration of condemnation is glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” 2 Cor. 3. 3, 6-10.

IN this wonderful chapter Paul reminds the Corinthians, in speaking of his ministry among them, of what its chief characteristics were. As a ministry of the New Covenant he contrasts it, and the whole dispensation of which it is part, with that of the Old. The Old was graven in stone, the New in the heart. The Old could be written in ink, and was in the letter that killeth; the New, of the Spirit that maketh alive. The Old was a ministration of condemnation and death; the New, of righteousness and life. The Old indeed had its glory, for it was of Divine appointment, and brought its Divine blessing; but it was a glory that passed away, and had no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth, the exceeding glory of

that which remaineth. With the Old there was the veil on the heart; in the New, the veil is taken away from the face and the heart, the Spirit of the Lord gives liberty, and, reflecting with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, we are changed from glory to glory, into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord. The glory that excelleth proved its power in this, that it not only marked the dispensation on its Divine side, but so exerted its power in the heart and life of its subjects, that it was seen in them too, as they were changed by the Spirit into Christ's image, from glory to glory.

Think a moment of the contrast. The Old Covenant was of the letter that killeth. The law came with its literal instruction, and sought by the knowledge it gave of God's will to appeal to man's fear and his love, to his natural powers of mind and conscience and will. It spoke to him as if he could obey, that it might convince him of what he did not know, that he could not obey. And so it fulfilled its mission: "The commandment which was unto life, this I found to be unto death." In the New, on the contrary, how different was everything. Instead of the letter, the Spirit that giveth life, that breathes the very life of God, the life of heaven into us. Instead of a law graven in stone, the law written in the heart, worked into the heart's affection and powers, making it one with them. Instead of the vain attempt to work from without inward, the Spirit and the law are put into the inward parts, thence to work outward in life and walk.

This passage brings into view that which is the distinctive blessing of the New Covenant. In working out our salvation God bestowed upon us two wonderful gifts. We read: "God sent forth His Son, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

Here we have the two parts of God's work in salvation. The one, the more objective, what He did that we might become His children—He sent forth His Son. The second, the more subjective, what He did that we might live like His children He sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. In the former we have the external manifestation of the work of redemption; in the other, its inward appropriation; the former for the sake of the latter. These two halves form one great whole, and may not be separated.

In the promises of the New Covenant, as we find them in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as in our text and many other passages of Scripture, it is manifest that God's great object in salvation is to get possession of the heart. The heart is the real life; with the heart a man loves, and wills, and acts; the heart makes the man. God made man's heart for His own dwelling, that in it He might reveal His love and His glory. God sent Christ to accomplish a redemption by which man's heart could be won back to Him; nothing but that could satisfy God. And that is what is accomplished when the Holy Spirit makes the heart of God's child what it should be. The whole work of Christ's redemption—His Atonement and Victory, His Exaltation and Intercession, His glory at the right hand of God—all these are only preparatory to what is the chief triumph of His grace: the renewal of the heart to be the temple of God. Through Christ God gives the Holy Spirit to glorify Him in the heart, by working there all that He has done and is doing for the soul.

In a great deal of our religious teaching a fear, lest we should derogate from the honor of Christ, has been alleged as the reason for giving His work for us, on the Cross or in heaven, a greater prominence than His work in our heart by the Holy Spirit. The result has been that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and His

mighty work as the life of the heart, is very little known in true power. If we look carefully at what the New Covenant promises mean, we shall see how the “sending forth of the Spirit of His Son into our hearts” is indeed the consummation and crown of Christ’s redeeming work. Let us just think of what these promises imply.

In the Old Covenant man had failed in what he had to do. In the New, God is to do everything in him. The Old could only convict of sin. The New is to put it away and cleanse the heart from its filthiness. In the Old it was the heart that was wrong; for the New a new heart is provided, into which God puts His fear and His law and His love. The Old demanded, but failed to secure obedience; in the New, God causes us to walk in His judgments. The New is to fit man for a true holiness, a true fulfillment of the law of loving God with the whole heart, and our neighbors as ourselves, a walk truly well-pleasing to God. The New changes a man from glory to glory after the image of Christ. All because the Spirit of God’s Son is given into the heart. The Old gave no power: in the New all is by the Spirit, the mighty power of God. As complete as the reign and power of Christ on the throne of heaven, is His dominion on the throne of the heart by His Holy Spirit given to us. (SEE NOTE C, on GEORGE MULLER.)

It is as we bring all these traits of the New Covenant life together into one focus, and look at the heart of God’s child as the object of this mighty redemption, that we shall begin to understand what is secured to us, and what it is that we are to expect from our Covenant God. We shall see wherein the glory of the ministration of the Spirit consists, even in this, that God can fill our heart with His love, and make it His abode.

We are accustomed to say, and truly so, that the worth of the Son of God, who came to die for us, is the measure of the worth of the soul in God's sight, and of the greatness of the work that had to be done to save it. Let us even so see, that the Divine glory of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is the measure of God's longing to have our heart wholly for Himself, of the glory of the work that is to be wrought within us, of the power by which that work will be accomplished.

We shall see how the glory of the ministration of the Spirit is no other than the glory of the Lord, as it is not only in heaven, but resting upon us and dwelling in us, and changing us into the same image from glory to glory. The inconceivable glory of our exalted Lord in heaven has its counterpart here on earth in the exceeding glory of the Holy Spirit who glorifies Him in us, who lays His glory on us, as He changes us into His likeness.

The New Covenant has no power to save and to bless except as it is a ministration of the Spirit. That Spirit works in lesser or greater degree, as He is neglected and grieved, or yielded to and trusted. Let us honor Him, and give Him His place as the Spirit of the New Covenant, by expecting and accepting all He waits to do for us.

He is the great gift of the Covenant. His coming from heaven was the proof that the Mediator of the Covenant was on the throne in glory, and could now make us partakers of the heavenly life.

He is the only teacher of what the Covenant means: dwelling in our heart, He wakens there the thought and the desire for what God has prepared for us.

He is the Spirit of faith, who enables us to believe the otherwise incomprehensible blessing and power in which the New Covenant works, and to claim it as our own.

He is the Spirit of grace and of power, by whom the obedience of the Covenant and the fellowship with God can be maintained without interruption.

He Himself is the Possessor and the Bearer and the Communicator of all the Covenant promises, the Revealer and the Glorifier of Jesus, its Mediator and Surety.

To believe fully in the Holy Spirit, as the present and abiding and all-comprehending gift of the New Covenant, has been to many a one an entrance into its fullness of blessing.

Begin at once, child of God, to give the Holy Spirit the place in thy religion He has in God's plan. Be still before God, and believe that He is within thee, and ask the Father to work in thee through Him. Regard thyself, thy spirit as well as thy body, with holy reverence as His temple. Let the consciousness of His holy presence and working fill thee with holy calm and fear. And be sure that all that God calls thee to be, Christ through His Spirit will work in thee.