**“Exposition of 2 Corinthians 3:7-11” Bible Echo and Signs of the Times 6, 13.**

E. J. Waggoner

Some stumble over the first clause of 2 Corinthians 3:7,-“The ministration of death, written and engraven in stones,” but the Scriptures furnish means for the complete exposition of this. Paul cannot mean that the *ministration* was written and engraven in stones, for that would be impossible, because the *ministration* was the service of the priests. Then it must be that he means that death was written and engraven in stones. But some will say, “This makes nonsense of the text.” Let us see. It is very easy to ascertain what was written and engraven in stone. Exodus 31:18 says that the Lord “gave to Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” “And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand. The tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.” Exodus 32:15, 16. These two tables were broken, and after Moses had, by the command of the Lord, made two other tables, he said, “And he [the Lord] wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the Lord spake unto you in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, in the day of the assembly.” Deuteronomy 10:4. These texts show that it was the ten commandments, and the ten commandments alone, that were written and engraven in stones; and therefore by the word “death,” in 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul must refer to the ten commandments. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 1}

But is it allowable to speak of the ten commandments as “death”? Are they death to anybody? The law is the cause of death to every sinner that shall perish, and so by metonymy it is called death. So when Paul describes his conviction as a sinner, he says of the law, “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.” Romans 7:10. We have found, then (1) that the law, which was the basis of the covenant, was death to all, and (2) that the ministration concerning that violated law offered no relief, but in itself tended to death. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 2}

Notwithstanding all this, there was a wonderful glory connected with the old covenant and its service. The giving of the law was attended with glory the like of which has never been seen on earth before or since, and will not be until the Lord shall come in the glory of his Father with all his angels. When Moses returned from the mount, his face was so glorified that the people could not look at it; and the glory of the Lord was present in the sanctuary to so great a degree that the priests were forced to obscure it with a cloud of incense, lest they should die. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 3}

Now let us briefly outline the new covenant. Paul says that this was established upon “better promises.” Its terms are found in Hebrews 8:8-12, which reads thus:- {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 4}

“For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 5}

We find here the same condition as in the old covenant,-the people are to obey the law of God. But this covenant is established on “better promises” than the first, in that the Lord promises to forgive their sins, to write the law in their hearts, and to remember their iniquities no more. These things are all accomplished by virtue of Christ, who is the mediator of the new covenant. Hebrews 8:6; 9:15. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7), by securing the remission of past sins (Romans 3:24, 25), and enabling us to walk in harmony with the law. Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 13:20, 21. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 6}

The law, then, is the basis of both covenants; hence it could not be done away with the old covenant, else there could be no new covenant. The terms of the new covenant leave no doubt on this point, and Christ’s connection with it brings the fact out still more clearly. Thus Christ is the minister of this new covenant (Hebrews 8:1, 2) and is now performing the ministration in the true sanctuary in Heaven. Hebrews 9:24. His ministration has reference to the law, for he came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and he is offering his blood to save men from sin. Romans 3:24; 1 John 1:7; Matthew 1:21. This redemption we get through faith (Romans 3:24), and faith establishes the law. Romans 3:31. The law itself, having been violated, brings death; Christ redeems us from its curse (Galatians 3:13), and thus becomes our life. Colossians 3:4. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 7}

Now note the contrast between the two covenants: The first had the ministration of death, because everything connected with it tended to death; the violated law was death to the sinner, and the earthly ministration freed no one from that condemnation. The second covenant has the ministration of the Spirit, because “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17), and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty and life. Galatians 6:8. But although there is no death in the second covenant, there is in the rejection of it, for the law is still death to sinners, and all who are opposed to Christ are sinners, and condemned to death; so Paul says that the letter of the new covenant kills. The reason is that holding the mere letter of the new covenant,-the performance of the gospel ordinances while not receiving Christ in the heart,-is really a rejection of Christ. Of the Lord’s Supper, Paul says that he who does not discern the Lord’s body, eats and drinks damnation to himself. 1 Corinthians 11:9. He is in the same condition as though he had never heard of the new covenant. But in every case, whether of the sinner under the old covenant, or of one who rejects the new, it is the law that causes his death. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 8}

In the text under consideration Paul contrasts the two ministrations as to glory. If the ministration which could not cleanse from sin, was glorious, the ministration of the Spirit, which gives freedom from sin, must be more glorious. “If the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” And so much more glorious is the ministration of the second covenant than that of the first, that in comparison the first covenant seems to have had no glory. Why the ministration of the second covenant should be so much more glorious than that of the first, is because it is established upon “better promises,” and Christ is its minister. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 9}

“For if that which is done away was glorious, much more than which remaineth is glorious.” 2 Corinthians 3:11. Now what was done away? The answer must be that it is that which was glorious. Verse 9 states that it was the ministration of condemnation that was glorious. Then it must be the ministration of condemnation that was done away; that which remains is the ministration of the Spirit. By no possibility can verse 11 be made to refer to the law, because it contrasts something done away with something that remains. And we have found that the law is the basis of both covenants, and therefore it cannot have been done away; but the ministration of the old covenant as well as the covenant itself was done away, as was indicated by the fading glory upon the countenance of Moses. But it needs no abstract reasoning to show that it is the tabernacle service, and that alone, to which the apostle refers in verse 11 as being “done away,” for he says, “if that which is done away was glorious,” showing by the “if” that he had before called attention to something glorious; and the only thing which he has so designated in this connection, is the ministration of death. Verse 7. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 10}

We think that any read who carefully follows this brief exposition will be able to see for himself, on reading 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 that the apostle is simply contrasting the glory of the service of the two covenants, and that the law of God is not under consideration at all, except by an incidental allusion which goes to show its permanent character. {BEST July 1, 1891, par. 11}