

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Jesus is Better

Sermon # 14

"A New and Better Covenant"

Hebrews 8:5-13

In our modern age we define a host of relations by contracts. These contracts whether they are formal or informal, helps to specify when the terms have been fulfilled.

But *"the Lord did not establish a contract with Israel or with the church. He created a covenant. There is a difference. Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract.*

According to the Bible, however, the Lord asks: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isa. 49:15) The Bible indicates the covenant is more like the ties of a parent to her child than it is a doctor's appointment. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. The parent finds out where the child is and makes sure he's

cared for. One member's failure does not destroy the relationship...." [

I.H. Marshall, *Jesus the Savior*, (InterVarsity Press, 1990) p. 275 -www.bible.org/illus/covenant]

Let's pick up the theme by looking back to Hebrews 8:4,
"*...there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; (5) who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."* (6) *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (7) For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. (8) Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— (9) 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 did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. (10) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (11) None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. (12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will*

remember no more.”(13) In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

The secret to understanding Chapter eight is to understand the meaning of a covenant. The key to understanding biblical covenants is to understand the difference between an unconditional covenant and a conditional covenant. Our Bible is divided between old covenant and new covenant. The Old Covenant or Old Testament is the record of the conditional covenant given to the nation of Israel. The blessings of the Old Covenant were conditioned on Israel’s obedience to the law that God gave with the covenant. The New Testament is the unconditional covenant with all who believe on the Son of God. The second intentionally replaces the first, the former even predicting and foreshadowing the new.

When it says in verse seven, *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.”*

This is not suggesting that the Law itself had flaws, but that the experience of human beings under the law was faulty. The Law could reveal sin, but it could not remove it. The sacrifices could cover sin, but it could not forgive it. In fact verse eight reveals the problem as, *“Because finding fault with them...”* Moses announces the covenant in Exodus 19:5-6,8 we read, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (6) And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* These

*are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”,,,,,(8)
Then ??all the people answered together and said, “?All that the Lord
has spoken we will do.?” So Moses brought back the words of the
people to the Lord.”*

But in fact everything that the Lord told them not to do, they did; and everything he told them to do, they did not do. So the writer of Hebrews explains that the problem was not with “it,’ that is the covenant, but was with “*them.*” The problem never was with God’s covenant.

Ray Stedman writes, *“The people of that day thought God wanted them to keep these Ten Commandments as the only way they could please him. They felt he demanded a rigid, careful, scrupulous observance of the Ten Commandments. But what they did not understand, though God pointed this out to them many times, was that God never expected them to keep it. He knew they could not. He did not give it to them to be kept, for he knew they could not keep it. He gave it to them to show them they could not keep it so they would then be ready to receive a Savior. But with presumptuous confidence they tried to keep it and when they could not, as of course God knew they could not, they pretended to keep it, just as we do today.”* [Ray Stedman. “The New Constitution” Heb 7:27-8:13.

www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/hebrews1/0090.html]

Despite Israel’s failure, God promises that the day will come when He will “*make a new covenant*” (v. 8) And the fact that the New Covenant is established on “*better promises*” (v. 6) makes the New Covenant better than the old.

The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because...

First, The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Shadows with Reality (v. 5)

"who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'"

It is particularly appropriate that on this the Sunday before Christmas that we consider the replacement of Old Testament shadows with reality. Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing. The coming of Christ into this world is the fulfillment of everything promised and foreshadowed by the Old Testament (Covenant) sacrifices for sin.

When God gave the Law (the Ten Commandments) to Moses and established the priesthood and the various aspects of sacrificial worship for Israel, these things were never intended to be permanent.

Verse five says that the tabernacle was a copy of heavenly things. When Moses was given the directions for building the Tabernacle, they were extremely precise as to the dimensions and the building materials. He was even warned about deviating from the pattern he was given (Ex 25:40). Why were the details so important? It was because it was all a shadow of a spiritual reality.

As the commentator William Barclay states so well, *"The earthly tabernacle is a pale copy of the real Temple of God; earthly worship is*

a remote reflection of real worship; the earthly priesthood is an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood. All these things point beyond themselves to the reality of which they are the shadows."

[William Barclay. The Letter to the Hebrews. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) p. 88]

If the glory of the Tabernacle was only a shadow and copy of the reality in heaven – then what must the reality in heaven be like? Use your imagination for a moment! But then realize that whatever you can imagine it to be no matter how wondrous – the reality will far exceed it. The apostle Paul speaking of the reality that awaits us in the heavenly realm wrote, (1 Cor. 2:9) *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* The Apostle John wrote in Revelation 5:11-13 of wonders he had seen in his vision of heaven. *"Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, (?12)? singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (?13)? Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*

? The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Shadows with Reality and...

Second, The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Externalism with Intimacy. (v. 10)

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

The New Covenant will have a different sort of law – an internal not an external law. Now the Spirit of God writes God's laws on the hearts and minds of his children – the true worship of the New Covenant is internal not external, real not ritual.

As Kent Hughes states when the writer says, *"I will be their God" means he gives himself to us. And "they will be my people" means he takes us to himself.*" [R. Kent Hughes. Hebrews: An Anchor For the Soul. Vol 1 (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 219]

In (1 John 3:1) the Apostle John wrote, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* This is a new degree of intimacy with God, previously unknown and unimaginable. This means family, in the deepest sense of the word. When Jesus addressed his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"Abba Father"* (Mark 14:36) the idea of having such an intimate relationship with God the Father was something entirely new. The term *"Abba"* means *"daddy"* and might well be translated *"Daddy, my beloved Daddy."*

The New Covenant gives us a new level of intimacy with God the Father and...

Third, The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Insecurity with Knowledge. (v. 11)

"None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."

Under the old Covenant the Jewish people constantly looked to the Rabbi to get their interpretation of God's word. The Rabbi was the expert, who knew everything and the people were ignorant followers who needed him to tell them what to do. Some Christians still act as if they are under that Old Covenant that they cannot read the word of God and understand for themselves what it says. They look to the experts whether priest or pastors as an elite class called the "clergy." But under the new Covenant there is really no such division into clergy/laity. The Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*

Under the new Covenant we can ALL come to God, as His own dear children – with his law written on our minds and hearts.

The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Insecurity with Knowledge and...

Fourth, The New Covenant Is Better Than the Old Because It Replaces Covering with Forgiveness (v. 12)

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

The phrase "remember no more" means "hold against us no more!" Sins are forgiven not just covered. Here is what man needed more than anything else and what the Old Covenant pictured but could not provide. The sacrifices of the Old Testament could temporary cover sins but they looked forward to a future fulfillment. For as the author says in Hebrews 10:4, *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."* For the sins to be forgiven there needed to be a new covenant relationship. The Old covenant is finally fulfilled.

The conclusion of the subject is given in verse thirteen, *"In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."* The Old Covenant was not bad, it had simply served its purpose. It had pointed to the Savior, and fore-shadowed the Savior, but now the Savior had come and there was no more need for the shadow. John MacArthur says, *"A shadow has no substance in itself, no independent existence or meaning apart from what it is a shadow of. It exists only as evidence of the real thing."* [John MacArthur. MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) p. 211]

When the Temple was destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70 there could be no more sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood came to an end. When verse thirteen was written the Old Covenant was ready to "vanish away." In less than five years, it had completely disappeared. But in reality the old sacrificial system ended when the once for all time

sacrifice of Christ on the cross was complete and the veil in the Temple was split in two (Matt 27:50-51). The destruction of the Temple only completed the closing of the Old Covenant by removing the place of sacrifice that no longer served a purpose.