

A Better Covenant

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • Hebrews 8:7-13

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together this morning, and if you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor. Or, you can use the cards in the pews this morning – not just if you are visiting with us, but also for special questions and prayer concerns. You can put those in the box on the wall in the entryway or give your card to me on your way out this morning.

We are here this morning in the name of Jesus, the name above all names. We meet in his name, we sing in his name, we pray in his name, and we remember what he did for us – his death, burial, and resurrection. And now, we wait for his return! To prepare for that day to come, we must obey the good news – believing the message, turning away from sin, confessing our faith that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And we've had many examples this week, starting with an update from the Lord's church down in Azle, Texas. They say that "The angels rejoice as Marvin Culbertson put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16) and walk in a newness of life (Romans 6:3-5)! He obeyed the gospel at 83 years of age! It's never too late on this side of eternity!" So good to see this!

This next update comes to us from Luis Rojas, who preaches down in Venezuela. As translated by Facebook, Luis says, "Thank you Lord for adding these 3 souls to your kingdom. How beautiful when people take the step to repent for the love of Jesus Christ. Today I share my joy with you beloved brothers because also my dad (Luis Rojas Sr) has come to Christ." Amen to that!

We have a quick update from the Eastland congregation down in Fort Worth, Texas. They say that "Dortaevious Harris, Jr. made that grand decision on Sunday, May 21, 2023 to put the Lord on in baptism at the Eastland Church of Christ. Welcome to the family..." Good news from Texas!

And this last one comes to us from Poland, where they say that "Today we have good news. A teenager from Zaporozhye, Ukraine, Yulia, was baptized in Warsaw. God touched her heart in obedience to him. Praise the Lord!" As our tradition has been, we share these pictures and these stories to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside

after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews, and today we are partway through the middle section of this book, where we have now come to the “meat” of this series of lessons. We’ve looked at Jesus as being from a BETTER PRIESTHOOD (based on the priesthood of Melchizedek, in Chapter 7). Today, we’ll be looking at Jesus as being the mediator of a BETTER COVENANT (in Chapter 8), we are heading toward Jesus serving as priest in a BETTER SANCTUARY (in Chapter 9), and then we’ll take a look at Jesus being a BETTER SACRIFICE (in Chapter 10).

Today, though, we come to a rather short passage concerning the New Covenant, and we pick up with Hebrews 8:7-13. At the end of last week’s study, we actually had just a bit of a preview with verse 6, where the author speaks of Jesus and says, *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”* Jesus, then, is the *“mediator of a better covenant.”* And that’ll be our focus this morning. My goal today is that we leave with greater sense of appreciation for this New Covenant that we are under today. We are amazingly blessed to be a part of it!

And just so we don’t have too much text on the wall all at once, I’d like to start with the reminder that the Old Covenant has failed (in verses 7-9), we’ll then look at some reasons why the New Covenant is better (in verses 10-12), and then we’ll close with the author’s conclusion (in verse 13).

I. But let’s start with the reminder that THE OLD COVENANT HAS FAILED.

And we see this in verses 7-9, where the author says,

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. ⁸ For finding fault with them, He says, “BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; ⁹ NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.

And this where the author inserts a rather large quote from the book of Jeremiah. This quote, in fact (starting in verse 7 and continuing through verse 12), is the largest direct quote from the Old Testament anywhere in the New Testament. He quotes it again, in fact, in Chapter 10. But he quotes it here, because it comes from one of the darkest times in the history of God’s people. Jeremiah is living through what Isaiah had predicted years earlier, that God’s people would abandon God’s Law, and they would be taken into Babylonian Captivity. Well, even in the days leading up to that captivity, Jeremiah still preaches a message of hope, letting them know that at some point in the future, God would establish a *“new covenant,”* a covenant not like the old one.

Now, whenever we talk the *“Old Covenant,”* it’s easy for us to think that this is a reference to what we commonly refer to as the “Old Testament” in our Bibles (Genesis through Malachi). After all, most of have

Bibles with a title page or a table of contents labeling those books as the “Old Testament.” But that’s not really the case. It may be better if we refer to those books as the “Hebrew Bible.” And here’s why: When the writer of Hebrews refers to the **“Old Covenant,”** he’s really talking about the Law as it was delivered through Moses. Remember: Adam and Eve were not under the **“Old Covenant,”** were they? Abraham was not under the **“Old Covenant,”** and neither Isaac and Jacob. And, in fact, we have other covenants during that time period. We have the covenant of the rainbow (in Genesis 9), where God promised to never flood the earth again. Later, we have God’s covenant with Abraham. Abraham lived hundreds of years before Moses. I’m just saying that what we commonly refer to as the **“Old Covenant”** is actually pretty specific and refers to God’s agreement with Moses and the nation of Israel.

So, now that we know we’re talking about the covenant ratified by blood during the days of Moses, the author of Hebrews makes the point that **“if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.”** And he continues, **“For finding fault with them, He says...,”** and then he continues. So yes, the Old Covenant was **“faulty,”** in some sense, but notice: The fault was **“with them,”** God says. The Old Covenant served its purpose, and its purpose (in part) was to expose sin, to categorize sin, to show the need for sacrifice. In that sense, the Old Covenant did exactly what it needed to do, which was to highlight human weakness. They failed to keep it! And God could see this coming from the very beginning. Back in Deuteronomy 31:20, God said to Moses, **“For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.”** In other words, God was not surprised when they failed to keep it. In a sense, that was the point of it. Everything God told them not to do they did, and everything God told them to do they failed to do. The point of the Law was to say: This is right, this is wrong, and if you do wrong you will die. Mission accomplished! The Law did what God intended it to do. We might think of the crumple zone in a car. After a crash, that car looks terrible, but it did what it was designed to do. Or we might think of a shear pin on a snowblower, designed to break off when you run over the newspaper, to avoid much more serious damage to the blower. As Paul says over in Romans 7:12, **“...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”** The problem was not with the covenant itself; the problem was with the people. The Old Covenant has failed, not because of God, but because of the people’s inability to keep it.

II. So, even back then, God promised that a new covenant was on the horizon; something better, something different. And this leads us to a series of three benefits to this New Covenant.

A. Starting in verse 10, we find that the New Covenant will be characterized as a HEART-FELT RELATIONSHIP.

I really struggled with the heading on this one. I thought about “tablets of stone replaced with law on the heart.” “Externals” isn’t really accurate, because God never intended his covenant with Moses to be merely external. Let’s notice verse 10,

**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 INTO THEIR MINDS,
AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS.
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD,
AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**

This was also predicted in Ezekiel 36:26-27, where God says, ***“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”*** The Old Covenant (the Law of Moses) was written on tablets of stone, kept in a gold-covered box, and that box was then kept securely in the back room of a sacred building that one man was allowed to enter only one time every year. But God’s new law has been written on our hearts. Under the New Covenant, then, we look at God’s law, not as a list of impossible demands, but as an expression of God’s heart. And when we obey, we obey, not grudgingly or under compulsion, not out of a sense of dread or a sense of terrifying obligation, but we obey, motivated by love. As Jesus said in John 14:15, ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”***

And, by the way, God’s new covenant started out through the spoken word of his only Son, and these words were obeyed from the heart, long before they were ever written down. We think of the response on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter preaches the good news, and the people respond by being ***“pierced to the heart.”*** They were responding, not to a list of bullet points chiseled on stone tablets, but they were responding to the good news. Peter then gave the command, ***“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** And when they respond, they respond from the heart. Literally, repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart. It is impossible to truly obey the gospel without a change of heart. And that’s what happened on Pentecost in Acts 2. They were confronted with the fact that they had murdered God’s only Son, they were pierced to the heart, and they had a change of mind followed by submitting to the command to be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins. The New Covenant, then, must be accepted from the heart.

B. In verse 11, we come to a second characteristic of the New Covenant as we find that the New Covenant is based on **KNOWLEDGE**. ****ppt****

The quote from Jeremiah continues in verse 11,

***“AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN,
AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’
FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME,
FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.”***

If there is one thing we would never need to say to any Christian anywhere in the world, it’s, ***“Know the Lord!”*** because this is the one thing that all Christians have in common. If you are a Christian, you know the Lord. Jeremiah, then, was predicting that a day was coming when all people who were in a covenant relationship with the Lord would have chosen to be in that relationship. Anyone in the covenant relationship has already made the decision to follow God’s new law. So, when Jeremiah says that ***“all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them,”*** he wasn’t talking about everybody in the world, but he was talking about those who are ***“fellow citizens”*** and ***“brothers”*** (according to the first part of verse 11). If you are a ***“fellow citizen”*** or a ***“brother”*** under this New Covenant, you already know the Lord.

This, by the way, was different from the Old Covenant, wasn’t it? Under the Old Covenant, people were basically born into it. If you were born to Jewish parents, you were an Israelite. It’s not a choice a child could make, but it was a choice that was made for them. I am reminded of those religious groups who practice infant baptism. That is a carryover from the Old Covenant, the idea that we enter the covenant at birth. But that’s not the way it is under the New Covenant. Under the New Covenant, those who enter the covenant are

not forced into it by their parents, but they do it of their own free will. And because of this, it is impossible for someone to be “born into the church.” You can be born to Christian parents, they can take you to church your whole life, but no one is a Christian simply because their parents are Christians. According to that discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, there is a birth involved, but it is a second birth, a birth that we choose when we are born of the water and the Spirit (a reference to baptism).

Knowing God, then, is one of the most basic requirements for entering into this New Covenant relationship with God. When we summarize it on the wall up here at the beginning of each lesson, we summarize it in the first step, under the heading “Hear and Believe the Gospel.” Without **“knowing,”** there’s no way to enter the Covenant. Everyone in the New Covenant, then, already knows! Knowing is what it’s all about! As Stuart read for us earlier (from Philippians 3), the apostle Paul’s whole goal in life was to know Christ Jesus his Lord, for whom he suffered the loss of all things. Compared to knowing Christ, everything else he lost in the process he considered **“rubbish,”** so that he might gain Christ. The New Covenant, then, is based on knowledge.

C. The third characteristic of the New Covenant (based on this quote from Jeremiah) is that the New Covenant brings TRUE FORGIVENESS, or, as we have it on the wall up here, the New Covenant REPLACES MEMORY WITH MERCY.

Continuing the quote from Jeremiah (in verse 12), **“FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”** Under the New Covenant, when we are forgiven, God truly forgets. We may remember, but that’s on us. When God forgives, he truly forgets. Those sins from the past no longer affect our relationship.

So here’s the question: If this is a characteristic of the New Covenant as opposed to the Old, does that mean that sins really weren’t forgiven under the Old Covenant? I would suggest: Yes and no. We will get to it, but in the next chapter (in Hebrews 9:22), the author will say that **“...according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** There was a whole lot of bloodshed under the Law of Moses. However, over in Hebrews 10:4 he continues by saying, **“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”** So, were sins forgiven or not forgiven under the Old Covenant?

I think we can illustrate this with something we do all the time. When we go out to eat, and if I pay with a credit card, have I paid for our meal? In a sense, yes. From the point of view of the restaurant, that bill has been paid. And yet, in another sense, I will not actually pay for that meal until the end of the month when we pay the statement from the credit card company. As I said a few weeks ago, “There is no such thing as a perfect illustration.” However, perhaps in a similar way, the sacrifices of the Old Covenant “paid” for people’s sins (in that it got them out from under the weight of those sins), but the bill came due at the cross. And, in fact, if Jesus had not shed his blood, then all of those sacrifices from Old Testament times would have been completely useless.

The benefit of the New Covenant, then, is that when we are forgiven, we are truly forgiven, and those sins from the past are completely forgotten by a God who knows everything.

Conclusion:

So, these are the blessings of the New Covenant: 1.) The external has been replaced with a close, intimate relationship with the Lord (the New Law is written on our hearts). 2.) Ignorance has been replaced with knowledge, and 3.) Merely covering sin temporarily has been replaced with true forgiveness.

As we come to the last verse in this passage, I just want to emphasize that because we are now under a New Covenant, the Old is truly OBSOLETE. We conclude this morning with verse 13, ***“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”*** ***“Obsolete”*** is a pretty strong word, isn’t it? About eight years ago, on a trip down to UW SWAP in Verona, I found an old self-inking rubber stamp for only 25 cents. And this one really caught my eye, because it says “OBSOLETE” in all capital letters. And when I came home with it, I posted on Facebook and that I’m “feeling a sermon coming on...maybe something from Hebrews.” That day is finally here! I’ve been stamping stuff around our house this week. If you’d like to stamp something this morning, just let me know. Our daughter identified this as being an accounting term, and I hadn’t thought of that. I was wondering why you’d want to stamp anything with this. But she illustrated by explaining that if you have a warehouse full of fidget spinners originally valued at \$1 million, fidget spinners aren’t really a thing anymore, they are ***“obsolete,”*** and they are no longer to be valued at \$1 million. The same might go for having an expensive spare part to a machine that no longer exists. That part is ***“obsolete,”*** and it may not be worth what you think it’s worth. In perhaps some similar way, the Old Covenant is ***“obsolete.”*** It was valuable for its time, but that time has passed, because something ***“new”*** has arrived.

Think back to the death of Jesus when the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. At that moment, the whole temple system was obsolete. The priests who saw that could have packed up and gone home. Those animal sacrifices were no longer needed; they were “obsolete.” And this is perhaps why so many priests became obedient to the faith (in Acts 6:7). Of course, it wasn’t obvious for everybody right away, and I think that’s why the author says that ***“...whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”***

I would compare it to sharpening a lawnmower blade in the garage and turning off the grinder. The wheel is still spinning, but it’s over. It became obvious to everybody in 70 AD when the Romans came in and leveled the city, including the temple, not leaving one stone on top of another, just as Jesus had predicted. Jesus is better. Don’t go back. There’s nothing to go back to.

The good news for us is: We live under a ***“new covenant,”*** and the new is better. And that’s the point of Hebrews 8. Jesus is the mediator of a ***“new covenant.”*** His Law is written on our hearts, we know the Lord, and he is merciful in a way that he will remember our sins no more! What a blessing! And as we close, I would just remind us that this new covenant was ratified, it was paid for, with the blood of Jesus. In Matthew 26, when Jesus established the Lord’s Supper, he took a cup, he gave thanks, and he gave it to the disciples saying, ***“Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”*** What a blessing!

Before John leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

This morning we praise you as our Father. You know us even better than we know ourselves, and yet, knowing what you know, you still made our salvation possible, sending your Son to this earth to live and to die in our place. This morning, we are thankful for the New Covenant, sealed with the blood of your only Son. In light of this sacrifice, we pray that we would forgive others just as you have forgiven us. We pray for greater patience when those we love let us down. We pray that you would give us the ability to forgive ourselves just as you have. Sometimes Satan reminds us what we've done, but help us remember, Father, that you do not remember. And we pray that we would live our lives with the joy that comes from knowing you.

We come to you today through Jesus, our Savior and the mediator of a New Covenant. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: furlakeschurch@gmail.com