

A Better Covenant

Hebrew 8:7-13

Halifax: 9 April 2023

Introduction:

Today in our sermon series from the epistle to the Hebrews we continue in chapter 8.

- Last time I preached from Hebrews, we covered Hebrews 8:1-6.
- Today we are going to cover the rest of the chapter—Hebrews 8:7-13.
 - However, since it has been a while since we were in Hebrews, I want to read verses 1-6 along with verses 7-13 and do a little review.
 - I also want to do this because verses 1-6 have such excellent content that we ought to apply every day.

Please give attention now to the reading of God’s holy word—beginning at Hebrews 8:1.

Hebrews 8:1-13: Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. ⁴ For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since 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.

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

Review: Hebrews 8:1-6 tells us that we have *such* a High Priest!

- A. The last two verses of chapter seven summarise why He is called *such* a High Priest.
 1. First, because He is a priest who can save us to the uttermost.
 2. Second, because He lives forever to make intercession for us.
 3. Third, because He is completely without sin.
- B. I urged you to make use of this priest!
 1. When you find sin in your life, remember, “We have such a High Priest.”
 2. If you come to Christ to be delivered, be assured that He will never fail you.

- C. In 8:1-6, the nature of His exceptional ministry is described.
1. First, that our priest has all authority in heaven and earth to save us—as our priest, He is at the right hand of the majesty on high.
 2. Second, that our priest ministers in the true sanctuary of God rather than in a mere copy made with man’s hands.
 - He brings us not to a building, but into communion with the Father Himself.
 3. Third, that our priest has something to offer that is worthy of heaven—indeed, He offered Himself to atone for our sin.
 - In Him, we have a priest who has fully provided the only offering that takes away our sins.
 4. Fourth, our priest is the mediator of a better covenant that is established (the word means legislated or established by law) on better promises.

TRANS> That brings us to today’s topic.

- The rest of Hebrews 8 speaks about the superior excellence of the New Covenant over the Old.

I. God’s word tells us here that there was something wrong with the Old Covenant that is corrected in the New Covenant.

- Does it actually say that there was something wrong with the covenant that God made with His people? It does!

A. Verse 7 declares that there must have been something wrong. Otherwise, there would have been no need for a second covenant.

- **Heb 8:7: “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.”**

1. What is meant here by the first covenant?
 - Is it the covenant that God made with Adam? or with Abraham?
 - No. Here it refers to the covenant that God made with Israel in the time of the Exodus when Moses brought them out of Egypt.
 - This is clearly stated in verse 9 where God says that the new covenant is **“not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.”**
2. This first covenant is called the Old Covenant and it has something wrong with it.
 - It seems surprising that God’s word should say that the covenant was not faultless. How can that be when God was the One who made it?
 - Let’s consider.

B. There are two things that were wrong.

1. First, there was something wrong with the covenant itself. It, the covenant itself, was not faultless.
 - It was perfect as far as what it was designed to do.
 - It was designed to show God’s people their sin. It did that.
 - It was designed to show them what needed to be done to change them and to secure their pardon. It did that too.

- Its faultiness was that it was inadequate because it did nothing to provide what we needed.
 - If you go to the doctor and he tells you are very sick and need heart surgery before the month is out, he had done his job as far as it goes.
 - Suppose he even provides a graphic video of the procedure and shows you what needs to happen.
 - That's all well and good, but if there is no one who can perform surgery and no place to perform it, there is a serious problem.
 - He can draw up the contract of what needs to be done, but that contract is faulty if there is no one to actually do it.
 - You are still dying and you have no remedy.
 - You are going to hold on to the contract until a surgeon comes along who can make a new contract by which he will carry out the work.
- God used Moses to show us what was wrong with us and what needed to be done.
 - Through Moses, He even gave us a covenant that exposed our sin and that specified by ceremonies and rituals what must be done to take away our sin. God commanded His people to keep up those ceremonies and rituals that they might keep before them what was needed
 - But as long as we only had actors showing us pictures of what needed to be done, we were in need of a priest who could actually perform the work—one like Jesus who would be seated at God's right hand with all authority, who would be able to bring us into communion with God (not just in a building), and who would provide a sacrifice that would take away our sin.
- What good was Moses and that whole Old Covenant system?
 - Paul tells us in Galatians.
 - It was given us, to use the language of our illustration, as a contract to hold on to until the one came who could and would do it.
 - It was to keep us waiting with patience for the only remedy.
 - It was to keep us from drifting off to rely on idols that could not take away our sin—or some other remedy that we might come up with.
 - No, here was God's way, and the people were to hold on to this pattern until He provided the priest He had promised—all the way back to the time of Abraham—and really back before that to the time of Adam.
 - He had told of a Son that would come from Abraham's line who would bless Abraham and his descendants (He would be provided for them) and all the families of the earth who would be saved.
 - Abraham and his offspring were given the covenant of Moses with a special place (the land of Canaan) where they could hold on to this covenant (by faithfully performing the rituals and holding on to the

commandments, all the while looking to God to provide the Son that He had promised.

- They of all people had the solution.
- It was to them that God would bring the surgeon who could and would perform the surgery.

2. But there was a second problem with that covenant.

- Do you know what it was?
- There was a problem with Israel—with Abraham’s descendants.
 - Look at verse 8. It says: **“Because finding fault with them [not with *it*—the covenant—but with *them*] He says, behold the day is coming when I will make a new covenant.”**
 - So the problem was not just with the fact that the Old Covenant did not provide the priest they needed, but also with the fact that people did not keep it. They did not hold on to pattern that God had provided for them in the Old Covenant.
 - God had asked them to continue to hold on to the covenant way that He had given them until the Son of promise came, but they kept on rebelling.
 - They neglected and distorted the pattern that God had given them with the priests and the tabernacle, and they even turned to other gods—false gods—for their help.
 - God was still going to provide the priest that He had promised through them—through a Son born to them—but He continually had to send prophets to rebuke them and punishment to correct them.
 - In time, their rebellion was so great that they had become useless in setting forth what God had promised to provide.
 - They had become so twisted and distorted that God rejected them.
 - Verse 9 explains that the New Covenant will not be **“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.”**
 - Perhaps you remember what God did. He raised up the Babylonians to come and destroy the temple where all the ceremonies of the Old Covenant were to be performed.
 - They carried off their king and their priests and the whole business came to a halt for about 70 years.
 - The nation as a whole had rejected God and the way of salvation that He had appointed for them.
 - He had good reason to cut them off.
 - Nevertheless, God promised that He would restore the old covenant worship before and that after that, He would make a new covenant with them in which He would provide the Son He had promised. He always preserved a remnant of those who followed Him as well.

TRANS> With God's Son, we have the priest who can do what God told us needed to be done in the Old Covenant...He is also a king who always does the will of God.

II. Now that the Son has come, we have a much better covenant with much better promises. Here are three promises that are better now that He has come.

A. The promise of a mind and heart in sweet harmony with God is better.

- Verse 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.”**

1. In the Old Covenant, God's laws were written on tablets of stone.

- The moral law summarised in the Ten Commandments and in the great commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is the way that we were created to live before God.
 - It is a summary of what pleases our creator.
 - It is the right way, the beautiful way to live.
 - It is the way of happiness and joy.
 - It is what is good and pure.
- We had it spelled out for us by God at Sinai, but we were not promised the ability to live this way.
 - We are dead in our trespasses and sins.
 - Our hearts and minds are twisted and perverse... we do not love what pleases God but are drawn like maggots to defilement.
 - We were helpless to change our sinful disposition.
- And so when God gathers His church, if He leaves them to their own way, they gravitate to idols and immorality.
 - This is what happened to the nation of Israel when their idolatry and sin became so great that God dragged them off to Babylon.
 - They had the directives, they had the commandments, but they did not have the grace to follow.

2. When Jesus came, the whole church was transformed to a body in harmony with God.

a. How did that happen?

- He became a man, true human flesh.
- He beautifully and fully kept God's law—it was deep within His heart.
- He was made the head of the whole church, the One who represents us all before God the way Adam did at the beginning.
- Because He had the law in His heart and mind, the whole church now has it in our heart and mind forever.

b. You might say that equation was this.

- Us without Jesus = a sinful church
- Us plus Jesus = a holy church that pleases God.
- We are all counted righteous because our head and representative is righteous.

- c. But that is not all! There is still more.
 - Not only are we counted righteous.
 - When He is our head, He gives His Spirit to each one of us to renew our hearts so that we as individual members delight in God's law.
 - It begins with the new birth where we turn in sincerity to follow God and to trust His Son for salvation.
 - Then we progress as He works in us by His Spirit and Word and providence to make us more and more conformed to His pleasure.
 - In the end, He will bring us to perfection.
 - d. This is so encouraging!
 - He actually fixes us.
 - He actually makes us good and holy.
 - As this work progresses, we begin to see how far we have to go, but we are encouraged to see the radical change in our attitude and the gradual but progressive transformation in conformity to our God.
3. The Old Covenant, as far as it went, was powerless to do anything more than tell us what we needed to do—how we ought live—how we ought go in God's law.
- But don't misunderstand.
 - The Lord worked in the Old Testament saints too or they would never have followed Him. How did David get a heart to write Psalm 119 and to be called a man after God's own heart?
 - Yes, God had even told Abraham that He would work in him.
 - But the difference is that now we have a perfect head in Jesus Christ so that it will never happen that our leaders will cause us to be cast out.
 - Those who know Jesus as their Saviour will always have a faithful, kind priest to represent them and be counted as those whose heart and mind delight to conform to God's will.
 - And as we look to this promise, to write His law on our heart, we will not be disappointed through Jesus our head.
 - As verse 10 says at the end, God will be our God and we will be His people.
 - That is the promise of life in harmonious conformity to His pleasure.
 - What a marvellous thing—those once dead in the sin can please God in Christ!
- B. The promise that we will all know God is better now that Jesus has come.
1. It is found in verse 11 with an interesting way of expressing it: **“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.”**
 - Actually, this has caused a lot of discussion about just what it means.
 - Some say that it speaks of the end when all is finally brought under God and the church has no unregenerate people.

- A peculiar adaptation of this held by a few modern Baptists is that it speaks of a change where in the New Covenant everyone in the covenant knows the Lord.
 - But it is obvious that this is not true in practice—the church certainly has plenty of unregenerate people—even churches that try their best to discover if people are born again before admitting them still have need to remove unbelievers.
 - It has always been the case that the true sons of God are the remnant according to election. That was true in the old as well as the new.
 - So no, this seems to be talking about something different.
 - Some say that it is simply speaking in relative terms. There are a lot more people who know the Lord in the New Covenant than there were in the Old—a lot more regenerate people.
 - That is certainly a legitimate interpretation. The Bible often speaks in that way—for example, when it says that the Holy Spirit was not yet given when we know that people had the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament too.
2. I think the best way to understand this is that we all know the Lord in the New Covenant because now He has been openly revealed as never before.
- As John says, when Jesus become flesh, we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - Now we can say that we have seen the Lord. He has been manifested in the sight of the nations, and all who come to believe know Him as their Saviour and Lord.
 - The Old Testament people knew Him only through shadows and types, but we know Him in spirit and truth.
 - We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - We see His life with eyes enlightened by the Holy Spirit.
 - We do not rely on prophets to tell us about Him as in the days of old, but we see Him as the one who walked among us and who loved us and went to the cross for us.
 - Yes, we know that through the prophetic Scriptures, but it is His life that is presented to us; we know Him because He came among us.
 - When this verse says that we won't need teachers, it certainly does not mean that we don't need the preachers and teachers that the New Testament tells us Jesus sent to us...
 - And the ones that He raises up for us today in the church that His apostle gave us guidelines for choosing and who were given instruction in how to teach.
 - No. It rather means that God is the One who opens people's eyes to enable them to see Jesus who has been revealed.
 - That is not achieved by human effort.

- We preach Him, as Jesus commanded, but only the Spirit can open the eyes so that one who did not know Him now knows Him.
3. And notice that He does this to all—from the least to the greatest.
- A brilliant theologian who is a master of the original languages and knows the scriptures inside and out knows the Lord,
 - But a simple man who never could learn to read may know and love the One who died for his sins just as well as the brilliant scholar.
 - A praying three-year-old knows Him,
 - A poor widow who has buried her husband and all her children and who has been through many trials and sorrows also knows Him.
 - And so does a hard working farmer and a once crooked politician who found repentance.
 - All the elect are taught of God.
 - That is more the case in the New Covenant because Jesus has been revealed—our Lord has made Himself known as never before.
- The third promise was certainly known in the Old Covenant, but is better known in the New.
- C. The promise of the complete forgiveness of sin.
- Look at verse 12: **For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.**
 - There are a number of ways that this is better in Christ.
1. First, when we look at the church as a whole through all the ages, we can say that in a sense, the church was not pardoned until after Jesus went to the cross.
- Yes, clearly, God forgave individuals in the Old Testament. He said so.
 - But what I mean is, the church did not yet have the atoning sacrifice for her sins that God requires.
 - She had ceremonies that were themselves powerless to atone.
 - As we saw, they were just a pattern designed to keep her looking to God to provide as He had promised to Abraham: “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided,” that is, the sacrifice for sin that He required.
 - Once Jesus finished His work, then the church was no longer a church waiting for God to provide the lamb that would take away our sins.
 - Now she was a church that had full provision in God’s Son and she could declare that Christ had suffered and died for her sins and that the Father had accepted His sacrifice for our forgiveness.
 - We went from being a guilty church to a forgiven church... from being a church waiting for God to provide to one rejoicing in what He has done.
2. There is a greater joy, a greater assurance, a greater revelation of God’s love.
- The transaction is complete and we can rest in His finished work.
 - We can come boldly to God in His name.

- We can more freely confess our sins because we know there is a sufficient offering to take them away—and we know that to doubt the sufficiency of this sacrifice would be unacceptable!
 - How could we even suggest that the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, might not be enough to secure our pardon?
- There is something final and complete about forgiveness in the New Covenant that was not known in the Old.
 - See that you embrace this reality with joy and gladness.
- It does us a lot of good to think about what would have become of us apart from the sacrifice of God’s Son.
 - Let us declare the good news to our neighbours, to our children, to the nations!
 - Let us shake off our guilt and give thanks to Jesus our Saviour.
 - He has set us free.

TRANS> Things are much better in the New Covenant than they ever were in the old.

- God’s law is written in our hearts by Christ and His Spirit. We know Him through Christ, and we have the forgiveness of sin through His sacrifice on the cross.

III. Verse 13 reveals to us that the Old Covenant has faded away.

- It says, v. 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.**

A. This tells us that the Old Covenant *has* faded away.

1. Keep in mind that it was written in 60 AD.
 - At that time, it was *becoming* obsolete, growing old, and ready to vanish away.
 - In our day, it has fully become obsolete.
2. The Lord gave His people a time of transition to move from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant mode of worship and practice.
 - When Hebrews is written, these statements are much stronger than they were a decade before when Galatians was written.
 - In 70 AD, the temple was destroyed by the Romans—a definitive end was put to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.
 - Now it is completely obsolete, and it has vanished away.

B. It is easy to see why the old was to fade away.

1. When you have the reality accomplished, you don’t need the mere pattern anymore.
 - When the surgeon performs the surgery, you don’t need the plan.
 - When you go out to eat, you don’t need the menu after the food has come.
2. Now is the time for us to partake of the blessings of Christ
 - Now is the time to believe and receive new life and forgiveness.
 - Now is the time to behold the glory of God in what is revealed in Jesus our Saviour.

- Now is the time to declare His glory among the nations and to grow in His likeness.
 - In Christ, we have everything we need.
 - Now we prepare for His return, feasting on the blessings of the New Covenant and spreading our joy until He comes.
- 3. Do you know this joy?
 - Don't hold yourself off.
 - Come freely, come to Him wholeheartedly.
 - We have such a High Priest.
 - We have a better covenant in Him.
 - **Ps 37:3: Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness.**