

The Epistle to the Hebrews

August 15, 2021

Hebrews 8:1-13

Reading: Hebrews 8:1-13

The New Covenant Supersedes The Old

The Nature Of Covenants

The writer of Hebrews has been emphasizing the superior High Priest which is Jesus Christ. He is superior to all the other priests because His priesthood predates the priesthood of Aaron set up in the Old Testament. In other words, the Old Testament priesthood was always a temporary priesthood. Jesus' priesthood dates as far back as Abraham through Melchizedek and then back to creation. The writer continues with his many points to show us the superiority of Jesus Christ, the eternal Priest as compared to the temporary Old Testament priesthood.

The next step in the writer's proof of Jesus' superiority is that of comparing the covenants that the priests mediate. A divine Covenant is an agreement or it is almost like a treaty God makes with man. God says, you obey Me and I will bless you. Basically, the 10 Commandments were given as the standard for godly conduct to God's chosen people. So, in the Divine New Covenant, God gives the terms for believers to live by. As with everything, God makes the rules and sets the boundaries. In the Old, it was the priest's responsibility to be the go-between or mediator before God for man. God always has kept His part of the covenant but because man has not - a priest was needed to offer sacrifices to atone for man's failure to keep his part. The offerings temporarily covered sin but did not remove sin.

What is amazing about a covenant between God and man is that God did not have to enter into a covenant at all. God was not obligated to make a covenant with

man. The Lord places Himself under obligation to fulfill His plan for mankind and the guarantee He will live up to the agreement, which He does perfectly all the time out of His love for His people. The Lord is perfect and we are sinners, so, where does that leave us? Our greatest need is the ability to meet God's covenant requirements, which we cannot not do for ourselves.

To better understand how God obligated Himself and man's inability to fulfill their obligations to God, let's read the covenant God made with Abram. Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 17. It will help if you follow along in your Bibles because I will be starting and stopping to comment as we work our way through this covenant. Now, reading at verse 1, **“When Abram (meaning exalted father) was ninety-nine years old** (This is the time, the age of Abram at 99 that God chose to begin the covenant. Abram had been promised by God to be the father of a great number of people who worship God and as this covenant continued later in Genesis 17 the birth of Isaac is promised, but not at this point) **the LORD (Yâhovah - meaning the existing one. Notice as we go through these verses the titles God gives Himself.) appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God (el - meaning God of power) Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.’ ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God (‘*elohiym* – meaning the one true God) said to him, ⁴ ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham (meaning father of a multitude), for I (deliverer) have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I (fruitful) will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I (giver) will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I (*quwm* – meaning establish) **will establish my (‘*aniy* /an·ee - first person singular – God is the one making this happen) covenant between me (I – the One) and you and your offspring after you****

throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God (*'elohiym* – meaning the one true God) **to you and to your offspring after you.** ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God (*'elohiym* – meaning the one true God). ⁹ **And God** (*'elohiym* – meaning the one true God) **said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.** ¹⁰ **This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.’** By the various names and titles God choose for Abraham to use as he recorded this exchange it becomes clear God is the covenant maker and keeper and the One setting the conditions and promises and mankind as they seek God are to live up to the covenant.

The covenant continued throughout the generations of God’s people. It is the covenant that binds God to His people. When God said I will fulfill certain covenant obligations He requires Himself to do them. If God were to fail to uphold His part, then He would be a liar and He could not be trusted, in short, He would not be God. However, throughout the ages God has always kept His end of any agreement or covenant. Mankind is the one who failed to kept their part.

As these promises progress through the centuries God recommits Himself to the generations following Abraham. The Bible traces this line of descendants, generation upon generation and traces the reoccurring covenant vows God makes with these people. What I want to say is that the New Covenant Jesus makes with His people the night of Passover on the eve of His crucifixion is the final stage of the Old Covenant. It is the pinnacle of God’s promises, it begins our move towards eternity.

One shortcoming of the Old Covenant was that it had no mechanism which would guarantee that both sides would adhere to their particular responsibilities. God always kept His covenant responsibilities and man rarely ever kept his.

As we think about covenant promises between God and man a few things to remember are; first, God initiated all or each step of the covenant. Man was never able to directly access God, it is God who makes Himself know to man. God has always shown His love for mankind in lowering Himself to address man. God shows His love in a magnificent way by giving man what he really needed - a superior High Priest, a true eternal mediator and intercessor for the people, the Messiah Jesus Christ.

The Superior Mediator (v. 1-4)

The final stage of God's covenant rests entirely upon the shoulders of Jesus, God the Son. Jesus alone would bring the final stage into view when He died on the cross. Jesus' greatness is found in His divine person and His perfect priestly work. He alone was the sinless Priest and He alone made the only perfect sacrifice for sin. The writer begins showing the greatness of Jesus in verse one, where we observe Jesus is superior because of His greater work. Reading verse 1, "[Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.](#)" Jesus' work is superior to any other priest because His work is finished. Jesus is seated on the eternal throne in heaven showing the finished work. He is not just seated on an earthly throne showing a finished task but He is seated in Heaven, this shows His work is completed. He is also enthroned showing His sovereign rule over the universe. John explained this as, Jesus prepared to go to the cross to finish God's covenant giving mankind Jesus' perfection before God for those who believe in Jesus for

their salvation. Reading John 17, verses 1 to 5, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.’ ” Jesus by His perfect life glorified God and at His death and resurrection Jesus came into His glory and brings people back into a relationship with the Father.

The writer tells us beginning in verse 2 that Jesus is superior to the old priesthood and the Old Covenant because Jesus is not a tabernacle made by man but He is the final, eternal and perfect tabernacle of God. Reading at verse 2, “a minister in the holy places, in the true tent or tabernacle that the Lord set up, not man.³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.” Jesus’ great sacrificial work is finished and salvation has come to those who give their lives to Christ. Currently Jesus’ priestly work is being done in the heavenly tabernacle – not the earthly one. He is serving His people as a Mediator and Intercessor between God and man and He does this while sitting at the right hand of God the Father. As Paul instructed Timothy,⁵ “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6) Jesus’ atoning sacrifice is final, but His priestly work continues. Jesus is still ministering to His people as He calls the elect and as He preserves them.

The Superior Guarantor (v. 6-7)

Verses 6 and 7 are important for us to understand how they apply to us, to each one of us. Reading at verse 6, “**But as it is, Christ** (anointed one) **has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.** ⁷ **For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.**” I want to focus on the fact that the New Covenant gives a superior blessing for believers today and its importance in one’s life. The Old Testament priest mediated the Old Covenant for the people. Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant; He established the New Covenant and as with the Old Covenant it was freely entered into by God for the benefit of His people. You will observe what Jesus did for you and the price He paid for your salvation when Patrick administers the Lord’s Supper in a short while. Remember these important words of our Lord, when He took the cup, blessed it and said, “**This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.**” (Luke 22:20)

The Eternal New Covenant (v. 10-13)

God had always taken the initiative to make covenants with man. Here, in the New Covenant it is the same. What would God do to make this covenant better than the old one? He would not only keep His end of the bargain, as He did in the Old but in the New, He would also pay the penalty for our failure to keep our end of the bargain. He fulfilled His part then lived a perfect life and kept our part for us. Afterward, He died to pay the penalty for our sin and covenant failings and gave us His righteousness. This is why the writer says, Jesus the creator of the New Covenant “**is enacted on better promises.**” The better promises of the New Covenant go all the way back to the prophet Jeremiah who gave us the words of

God, “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.” (Jeremiah 32:39) This was followed by the words of God written by the prophet Ezekiel, “I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 11:19) This is what the writer is basing verses 10 to 12 on and wants his readers to connect with, reading at verse 10, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ or they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.
¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” The writer is showing that God’s plan, from the beginning was to bring about the New Covenant through His Son – the New Covenant is not external but an internal covenant. The covenant is not written on tablets of stone but written on our minds and hearts. Because it is written on our hearts it is an internalized covenant that becomes who we are as Christians. The Holy Spirit who has taken up residence within us leads us into truth, producing right love and right behavior. With the New Covenant we are changed from the inside out - not like the Old that worked to change one from the outside to the inside. When Christ calls us and we experience salvation He gives us a new heart. This new heart is what has to be there for us to start to change. This spiritual heart is sensitive to God’s desire for us. Over time we begin to walk as He would have us to walk because it is our inward desire to do so.

The New Covenant not only shows us God’s will but gives us the power through the Holy Spirit to effect change. The former Law could only show us

where we sinned; it never gave us the power to obey. The New Covenant frees us from bondage of sin and gives us the ability to resist sin and live godly lives. Verse 10 tells us that in the New Covenant we will have knowledge of God's will; **"I will put my laws into their minds"** and by the residency of the Holy Spirit we will have a desire to seek after God's laws because God **"writes them on their hearts"**. The New Covenant brings God's people an internalized law. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Law of God becomes a part of us and the Spirit works to cause us to fulfill the Law of God and to desire God's Law.

We should think through this on a practical level and be reminded that when a person is saved their minds begin thinking different thoughts. No longer are we set on things of earth but our minds are set on the things of heaven. This is what Paul was thinking when he wrote to the Roman church, ⁵**"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."** ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸**Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** ⁹**You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.** Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰**But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.** ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, **he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."** (Romans 8:5-11) At conversion we are given the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. He gives us a new heart and a new mind to think and desire spiritual things. It is at this point we must go after spiritual wisdom and knowledge. The Holy Spirit gives us

spiritual wisdom to understand the Word of God, but we must make the effort to seek God and study His Word. We must acquire knowledge of God and His will by the Holy Spirit revealing these through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit does not give spiritual wisdom without the effort on our part for drawing near to God through His Word.

Let me ask, “How do we know what God’s will is?” The answer is simple and straight forward, He reveals it to us through His Word of truth. As Jesus clearly said of God the Father, **“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”** (John 17:17) If you are not spending time in the Word, you are not gaining the truth and wisdom of God to feed your soul, heart and mind and this would be a grave error.

As you are fully aware there is an inner conflict. I wish we had our eyes always fixed on the spiritual things but we are also living in a sinful world that tugs at us and plays toward our sinful nature consistently trying to draw us away from God. As a Christian the internal New Covenant has become a part of us but there still remains our old sinful self. So, there is now a battle waging within our very being. If we aim to win the battle, we must prepare ourselves for the battle. Ephesians chapter 6 speaks of the Armor of God and it would be beneficial for you to read it. The battle within is as Paul laid out for the Roman church, saying, ²¹ **“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind** and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.” (Romans 7:21-25) Paul who had a zeal for God unequaled by most knew this battle of God’s Law written on our hearts and the evil of the world trying

everything it can to take our hearts away from God. As believers all throughout our life we battle against sin. We have the desire to do God's will because it is now a part of us and we, at times have a desire to sin, coming from our old nature.

How do we deal with battle on a day-to-day basis? What do we do? We feed our new nature by reading and studying God's Word and this strengthens us to resist the temptation to sin. In time, our new nature begins to dominate the old; this is the process we refer to as sanctification, the growing stronger in Christ as we mature as spiritual people of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. As time goes on - we will live more and more like the believer God wants us to be.

While here on earth the battle rages, but ultimately, the New Covenant provides forgiveness of sins making communion with God a reality while we are in the process of becoming like He wants us to be. As verse 12 tells us, [“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”](#) Praise be to God! At death the battle will be over and the war is won because ultimately, we will be perfected when all sin is done away with and we have spiritual glorified bodies.

Every step of the way the Divine Covenant was remade with each generation, ever moving toward Christ, God would say, as He did through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, [“They shall be my people, and I will be their God.”](#) (Jeremiah 32:38 and Ezekiel 11:20) The New Covenant is founded on greater promises. As the writer ends chapter 8, in verse 13, [“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”](#) God promises to cause us to be forgiven and accepted as His children. He also promises to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Let the

Word of God reside in your heart and mind and soul become the spiritual person
God desires you to be. Live for His glory! Amen!