

Hebrews 8:1-13 a Better Covenant

by Carl Carmody

The new covenant is a better covenant that brings salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through obedience to the law.

Scripture: John 19:30, Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 8:7, Hebrews 8:10-11, Hebrews 8:13

Topics: "New Covenant", "Faith Alone"

Description

Carl Carmody preaches about the story of Telemachus, a fourth-century Christian who brought an end to gladiator battles in the Roman Colosseum by bravely standing up for Christ, illustrating the power of one voice speaking the truth in God's name. This act mirrors Jesus' death and resurrection, which inaugurated a new and better covenant accessible only through faith. The new covenant is superior as it is ministered by a perfect High Priest, completed in Christ's finished work, and founded on better promises of grace, internal change, forgiveness, and external blessings.

Transcript

A new and better way.

Charles Colson, in his book, *loving God*, tells the story of Telemachus, a fourth-century Christian.

He lived in a remote village tending his garden and spending much of his time in prayer. One day he thought that he heard the voice of God telling him to go to Rome. So he set off on foot.

Wearied weeks later, he arrived in the city at the time of a great festival. The little man followed the crowd surging down the streets into the Colosseum. He saw the gladiators stand before the emperor and say, "We who are about to die salute you." Then he realised these men were going to fight to the death for the entertainment of the crowd. He cried out, "In the name of Christ, stop."

As the games began, he pushed his way through the crowd, climbed over the wall, and dropped to the floor of the arena. When the crowd saw this tiny frame of a man rushing to the gladiators and saying, "In the name of Christ, stop," they thought it was part of the show and began laughing.

However, when they realised it wasn't, the laughter turned to anger. As he was pleading with the gladiators to stop one of them drove a sword into his body. He fell to the sand and as he lay dying his last words were, "In the name of Christ, stop."

Then a strange thing happened. The gladiators stood looking at the tiny figure lying dead on the sand. A hush fell over the Colosseum. Way up in the upper rows, a man stood and made his way to the exit. Others began to follow. In dead silence, everyone left the Colosseum.

The year was B.C. 391, and that was the last battle to the death between gladiators in the Roman Colosseum. Never again in that great stadium did men kill each other for the entertainment of the crowd. Why? Because of one tiny voice that could hardly be heard above the noise of a blood thirsty crowd. One voice -- one life -- that spoke the truth in God's name.

Telemachus' action brought in a new era, just as another person's action on a cross at Calvary did 2000 years ago. Jesus' death and resurrection delivered mankind from the penalty and power of sin inaugurating a new covenant a better covenant. However, a covenant that can only be accessed by faith.

This new covenant is better for 3 reasons

(i) It is ministered by a superior High Priest v1-2

(ii) It is ministered in a better place v3-5

(iii) It is founded on better promises v6-13

(i) This new covenant is ministered by a superior High Priest v1-2.

Having shown the superiority of Christ the writer, then says if Christ is superior so must the covenant be, because they are obviously intrinsically or vitally linked. There are four things to note here

(1) Jesus was perfect v1 Virgin Birth

This takes us back to chapter 7:22-28 where His sinless perfection is highlighted in v26-27. "For such a high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless (innocent), undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this he did once for all when He offered up Himself."

However despite this perfection Jesus was not unable to identify with our needs, our temptations, struggles and sufferings. Heb 4 v 15 "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

(2) A completed task v1

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus as our High Priest is seated at the right hand of God. This signified that Jesus' work of redemption was completed. John 19 v 30 Jesus declares; "It is finished". The word finished means, an end, accomplished, to achieve a goal.

A number of things are worth noting here. If you go through all the paraphernalia in the tabernacle you will not come across a chair. The O.T priest always remained standing in the tabernacle because his task was never finished. Each sacrifice served as a reminder that none of the animals offered provided a finished salvation. The blood of animals did not wash away our sin, but only covered them until Jesus went to Calvary to take our sin away.

Also if something is finished it requires no further additions to bring about a full salvation. The old covenant was predicated on man keeping the law. So it was a covenant based on what man did i.e. obedience to the law.

The applications for this new covenant are clear. Salvation is based on a person -- Jesus Christ, full stop. Salvation is not based on Jesus Christ plus baptism or works or any other activity. John 5:39-40.

Jesus superior priesthood is further illustrated by where He is seated -- on a throne. This points to His royal lineage, ie who Jesus Christ is, what He left behind in coming to earth and thus the significance of His redemption of mankind. -- The Cost.

The High priest never sat down in the tabernacle, and never sat on a throne. Only a priest after the order of Melchizedek could be enthroned, because Melchizedek was both king and priest.

Lastly note where Jesus our better High Priest is seated on a throne -- in the heavens Phil 2:8-10 speaks directly to this "And being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth."

(ii) It is ministered in a better place v3-5 9

The writer to these Hebrew believers takes time to spell this out. He knew that his readers were aware of a real temple in Jerusalem, and that priests were offering sacrifices and gifts. The danger for these new believers was to run with what they could see. It would have been so much easier to go back under the old, obsolete Mosaic law system.

Why would they contemplate this. For much the same reasons people stay in a cult or a religion today. It is familiar, comfortable, secure and one doesn't have to think it through. Like the journalist who says, "Give me the story and don't confuse me with the facts."

How then do we know that Jesus is ministering in the Heavenly Sanctuary? The high priest was to serve others by offering gifts and sacrifices on their behalf in an appointed place. Since Jesus is seated in the heavenlies it is reasonable to assume that His sanctuary is in the heavens.

In Heb 8 v 3 the word something means offered once and for all and is in the singular, which helps us allude back to the finished work of Calvary. Jesus Christ offered Himself once and for all as a sacrifice for our sins so that we may be delivered from the penalty and power of sin, as well as obtaining forgiveness for our sin.

Then in verse 4 a genealogical argument is presented. If Jesus Christ was on earth He would not be able to function as a priest, because they were appointed from the tribe of Levi. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah the royal lineage.

However, He can serve as our High Priest because in heaven the order of Melchizedek rules not the order of Aaron.

Then in verse 5 this better place is pictured for us in the typology of the sanctuary as against the true sanctuary mentioned in verse 2. A type is an Old Testament picture of a New Testament truth.

The writer is endeavouring to clarify types as against the reality.

The Greek word for pattern is Tupos where we derive our English word type. So the writer is saying that the priests were serving in a sanctuary that was a copy or an example of the real thing. Just recently I read somewhere of an art gallery that had parted with a considerable amount of money for a very good copy, discovering their worst nightmare. If I remember correctly it was a painting by the artist Rubens. The gallery had parted with a considerable amount of money for a very good copy. Whilst it looked very good it was still a copy.

The sanctuary in Jerusalem was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. God's directive to Moses to, "see that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." was very important. Because every detail pointed to some future reality of Jesus Christ's redemptive work on Calvary, or some divine characteristic.

M.R. De Haan in his studies on the Book of Hebrews indicates that

Silver pointed to redemption

Gold pointed to the deity of God

Wood pointed to the humanity of Christ

Brass pointed to judgement

Altar pointed to the cross

Shewbread pointed to the bread of life

Candlestick pointed to the Light of the world

Incense pointed to High Priestly intercession

For these Hebrew believers and indeed for us it is a telling argument. These believers were looking to place themselves under an inferior covenant arrangement, that relied on their obedience as a condition for blessing -- law and merit. Rather than place themselves under the new covenant -- grace and mercy.

We place ourselves under the old covenant when we allow ourselves to be drawn into legalism. Just recently a young man came to Challenge to give us some books he could no longer agree with doctrinally. He took the opportunity to tell me why the change. He had examined the scripture and concluded that the instruction to keep the Sabbath holy should be adhered to. He and his wife were now involved with the reformed SDA group. This young man had failed to acknowledge the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. He was placing himself under an inferior covenant. We still adhere to a day of rest called the Lord's Day or the first day of the week.

If you are trusting in rules and regulations instead of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ you are placing yourself under the old covenant an inferior covenant. Paul had the same concerns in Gal 3:1-3 "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as, crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"

(iii) It is based on better Promises v6-13

Have you ever had someone make a promise to you and not keep it. It is very disappointing when it happens. Every now and then I have one of my daughters ring me at work requesting paper or cardboard or a box. The promise if made is to deliver that night.

I get home and try to unwind. My daughter comes and asks, "Dad did you remember to bring home the A3 paper." On no I clean forgot and I kick myself for forgetting and renew my promise. Thankfully my girls are very understanding and forgiving.

It is wonderful to know that God's promises are sure. Amen. There are four significant aspects to these promises.

1. The promise of God's grace v7-9.

It is very significant that the writer to these Hebrew believers moves to the Old Testament to bring home the fact that, the new covenant he had been speaking about wasn't really all that new. One of the most revered prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah spoke about it several hundred years before the cross of Calvary. Similar words were spoken by Ezekiel in chapter 36. So the Old Testament prophets were flagging the fact that the Old covenant had problems as Heb 8 v7 indicates and a day would come when God's own Son would bring in a new covenant of grace.

The word used for covenant in the Greek is *διαθήκη*. Ordinarily a covenant is an agreement entered into by two people on mutually agreed terms. If one or the other brakes the conditions the covenant becomes void. Old Testament examples include Joshua and the Gibeonites Jos 9v6 David with Jonathan 1 Sam.23 v18. The primary use of the word is between Israel and God.

However as William Barclay explains there is a strange point that has wonderful implications. For all normal uses the Greek word for agreement is *ἐνθήκη* which is the word for marriage covenant or bond or agreement between two states However, in all normal Greek *διαθήκη* does not mean agreement, but a will. Now why should the New Testament use this word for a covenant?

Barclay explains that the word always describes an agreement entered into on equal terms. The parties to a are on the one level and each can bargain with the other. But God and man do not meet on the same level/terms nor can they.

In the biblical sense of a covenant the whole approach comes from God. You can see how this brings a whole new dimension to God's unconditional love. So man cannot bargain with God; he cannot argue about the terms of the covenant; he can only accept or reject the offer that God makes.

The Supreme example of this type of agreement is a will. A will is not made on equal terms but entirely by one person, the testator. No other party is allowed to alter or amend it, but can only accept or refuse the inheritance offered.

This is why our relationship with God is described as a *διαθήκη*, a covenant for the terms of which only one person is responsible. You can see why salvation is described as a work of grace. The whole initiative for our salvation, our redemption comes from God alone.

The old covenant was only effective on the prerequisite of obedience to the law. The new covenant is effective on the basis of God's grace, it does not depend on man's faithfulness to God, but on God's faithfulness to man.

Note the "I wills" in these final verses. Six times God says I will. The fact that Israel was unable to keep the old covenant didn't mean that it was at fault but rather theirs and our sinful hearts.

2. We see the promise of internal change v10.

The old covenant dealt with the external. They were to write it on their wrists on their foreheads and on their door posts. All this was to serve as a reminder of the old covenant agreement they had made with God. What Israel discovered was that it didn't change their hearts. The law was external written on stone. What was needed was for God's law to be written on their hearts.

The new covenant was internal and as a result would change their external behaviour. In essence they and us have received the divine nature through the person of God's Holy Spirit. Not only does this change our lifestyles, it changed the motivation for obedience. With the old covenant obedience was on the basis of fear.

William Barclay states it so well "Men and women would obey God not because of the terror of punishment, but because they loved Him. They would obey Him not because the law compelled them unwillingly to do so, but because the desire to obey Him was written on their hearts."

Sad to say there are some Christians who believe they are saved by grace, but live their lives according to the Old Testament law -- the old covenant. Warren Wiersbe states "They want the new covenant for salvation and the old covenant for sanctification."

Trying to be holy people by endeavoring to keep the old covenant in our own strength simply won't work. It will only happen when we yield to the Holy Spirit within.

3. We have the promise of God's forgiveness for all vs 11-12.

As Warren Wiersbe states "Old Testament sacrifices only served as a remembrance of sins, not a remission for sins."

Only the once and for all perfect sinless sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary's cross could open the way for forgiveness and cleansing. Whereas Old Testament law only provided a covering. All of us have had to get insurance for our house or car. After getting our quotes we decide which company to go with. We give them all the details and then we are given a 'cover note' for two weeks to give us time to pay.

That is exactly what has happened with the Old Testament Law. It was a 'cover note' for sin until Jesus paid the bill for our sins on Calvary so we could be forgiven and cleansed.

So what does it mean when God says I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more. Well obviously God doesn't forget or He would cease to be God. The word remember means not to hold against us any more.

Often in dealing with people the issue of forgiveness comes up. Some will say I can forgive but I can't forget. Obviously it is impossible to forget. But the concept of forgive but I can't forget. Obviously it is impossible to forget. But the concept of forgiveness is that we don't hold anything against that person. We

may remember what someone has done against us, but forgiveness means that we treat them as though they had never done it.

That is exactly how God deals with us.

4. Lastly the promise of external blessing v13.

This new covenant was to be a radical change. The word new means not only new in time but more importantly in quality.

Two words are used for the old covenant. -- aging -- aging to decay; and -- wiping out a city, obliterating an inscription or abolishing a law.

So that covenant which Jesus brings is not only new in quality but completely cancels out the old.

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