

# Beyond Religious

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the book of Hebrews, emphasizing the importance of understanding the two covenants - the Old Covenant primarily outward and the New Covenant inward and spiritual. It highlights the contrast between human effort in religion and the rest available through Christ in the New Covenant. The speaker urges listeners to cease from their own works and enter into God's rest, emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit to break the chains of sin and provide a new heart. The sermon concludes with an invitation to respond to the truth of the gospel and enter into the rest that remains for the people of God.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 4:10, Acts 1:8, Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:2

**Topics:** "Covenants", "Rest in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Now, what I'd like to do is talk to you in this session around some verses in the book of Hebrews. If you have your Bible and you want to open them there, you certainly may. The writer to the Hebrews is unknown to us.

There are those of us who believe it was the Apostle Paul who wrote it. Others have a different idea. And in the final analysis, it doesn't really matter.

We believe that it's Scripture that is inspired by the Spirit of God and is tremendously profitable for us. We're so grateful to God for it. The people that the writer is addressing are the people of God.

They're Jewish people, and of course that's where the title of the book comes from. And specifically, I believe the writer is writing to Jewish people who have become exposed to and have responded to the Christian message, the Christian gospel. And the Apostle here is writing this very, very important document to them.

It's been said before, and by me many times, that the book of Romans is the great doctrinal statement of the Christian faith. And then we come over to the book of Hebrews, and this is, it's different in so many ways, but once again, it's a doctrinal statement with particular focus to the Jewish believers, but is a tremendous help and encouragement to us. And I hope we'll see something of that as we proceed.

It seems as though, without a doubt, the Apostle in writing is anxious to point out to these Jewish believers the importance of the two covenants, which will be referred to as the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. I know there are others who see the multiple covenants and so on, but we're just dealing with this very simply and directly here in this session. The first covenant, which is referred to as the Old Covenant, is primarily an outward covenant, not exclusively by any means, but primarily outward and pertains to physical, tangible things, as well as addressing the moral issues of the heart, as we know very well from the Ten Commandments, which are part of it.

The second, or New Covenant, is inward, it's an inward covenant, and its focus is primarily spiritual. Of course God is the one who made both covenants with men, and I think it's been helpful to think of the word covenant in terms of it being an arrangement. God made a first arrangement in terms of his dealings with men and women, and then he made a second arrangement.

To understand more about these two covenants and how they relate to one another and so on is a tremendously important study, and it's been a thrilling study of mine for many, many years now, but it would take far more time than we're able to give in this session. I just wanted to sort of lay some groundwork here by saying this already. Let me just move on then and say that in fact, in respect to God's Old Covenant, man's unregenerate heart rendered him utterly incapable of keeping his side of the covenant, and yet at the same time, man found some degree of ease with the outward religious rules and practices.

I've already said he was unable to keep and give and provide the response that was demanded, but nevertheless, I think, thinking of my words carefully, he found a degree of ease with the concept of outward religious rules and practices. You know, the old man, as Paul speaks to the Romans in chapter 7, the old man is a worker, and he's predisposed to working, which in fact is alien to the new covenant. And more needs to be said about that, but that'll have to be another time.

But this is all relevant to us because I think today the evangelical company, the evangelical crowd, speaking in the broadest sense, tends to be entertained more by the unholy than seeking the knowledge of the holy. That's a very serious indictment to make, but I do believe it's true. I know something of this from my own experience and certainly from observations and conversations with countless numbers of people over these many years, that they're more comfortable being entertained by the unholy, whatever that may be and whatever falls into that category, than with seeking earnestly the knowledge of the holy.

I think so many, and I'm being a little bold in saying this, but so many like fools allow the things that are precious to slip through their fingers, as it were, like so much sand while they're playing with the baubles of this world. While the evangelical people don't engage in the sacrificial system, which was so much a part of the old order, the old arrangement, they tend nevertheless to drift toward religion and being religious. The kind of religion I'm thinking about is the religion of human effort.

A religion that's centered, I think in so many cases, more upon the soul than it is upon the spirit. Of course there are exceptions, many, many exceptions, but I'm speaking very broadly from my own observations. It seems to me, you judge whether you agree with me, but it seems to me that few today in our present

culture truly think and sincerely question the important things of the Christian faith and the Christian life.

And I think seldom do people truly grasp the distinction and the contrast between these two covenants that I've been referring to, the old and the new covenant. And as the result of that, they tend to conveniently drag Old Testament concepts and mix and mingle them with New Testament teaching. And frankly, they don't fit.

And nobody seems to notice, or perhaps I should rephrase that and say, but few seem to notice. You know, today we have, well, let me put it this way first. I'm thinking of something that the Apostle Paul said in the course of his writing on one occasion.

It's just a phrase that I want to pick out. He referred to the Jews' religion. He does it twice within the space of about three or four verses, the Jews' religion.

Well, I think today we have the Christian religion, this religion of human effort. You know, a number of years ago, I think most of, if not all of us were familiar with the initials WWJD. People would live around people's hats, coats, t-shirts, bands around their wrists and so on.

WWJD, what would Jesus do, is what was represented. And the issue behind that was really a sense of need or an activity of attempting to copy the Christ of history. But that is not true authentic New Testament biblical Christianity.

The issue is not calling us to try to be like Jesus. There's a much deeper message that the New Testament brings. I'll be jumping ahead of myself a bit, but I must emphasize what that is.

Of course, it's what Paul also states this way as Christ in you, the hope of glory. That lies right at the very core of the New Covenant experience. Christ in you.

It is no longer I that liveth, but it's Christ who lives in me, said the Apostle. But in this, that I'm referring to as the Christian evangelical religion, and I'm an evangelical just to keep the record straight, but there's an acceptance with the human struggle not to sin. And it's accepted as being part of the normal Christian experience.

You know, I love the words that Charles Wesley has put together in such wonderful ways for us. And as someone mentioned, I think earlier that in so many of these hymns, they're just like doctrinal statements. But less known and we're less familiar with this fact that Charles Wesley had an incredible ability with sarcasm.

And one of his poems that he wrote, which is quite long, and I won't attempt to read it all, but it goes like this. Sinners and saints at once they are. They send forth bitter streams and sweet good trees, yet evil fruit they bear.

And Christ in them and Belial meet. Their pure in heart are all unclean and born of God, they can't but sin. You know, I think if the Apostle Paul had been exposed to what's going on today, I mean, he had his own issues to deal with as we all know so well.

But in our culture and with the kinds of things that I've been alluding to in this kind of introduction here, I think Paul would say something very similar to what he said to the Galatians in Galatians chapter three, right at the outset of the chapter. He raises the question, he says, who has bewitched you? Another

translation puts it this way, who has cast a spell upon you that you should, and then he goes on to enunciate what he had in his mind. But it seems as though for so many, a fog has settled upon our thinking, there's an unthinking acceptance of glaring inconsistencies and incongruities that no one seems to pay attention to, few seem to notice.

And so many people never get beyond merely being religious. You know, it was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who made a very, very bold statement. He made many of them, of course.

But on one occasion, he said this, if your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged. And you are an unsaved person. It's amazing that he got such crowds to listen to him, when you think about it.

But there you are. In the fourth chapter of Hebrews, let me just read one verse. I'd like to read all the chapter, and I'd like to deal with it consecutively.

That would be impossible in the 40 minutes or so I've got here. But in verse nine, we read these words, and I'm using the King James translation. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

What that statement is saying, if I can just reduce it down to something very, very, very simple and succinct, it is stating that there is something more that is clearly not enjoyed by everyone who professes to be Christian. There remains therefore a rest to the people of God. This was very poignant for the Jewish believers, new Jewish believers, that he was addressing.

I believe it's very appropriate and important to you and me today. There is something more that is not enjoyed by everyone. You know, in and as part of God's covenant with his ancient people, Israel, he bequeathed to them a land.

It was, and it's referred to in this way on one occasion, it's referred to as a rest. God was giving those people a rest because these were people who had been held up in Egypt in bondage and suffering greatly in that bondage, crying out to God for deliverance and for help. I mustn't get into this story because it's so many parts and so many factors are so relevant.

But the fact is that God made this statement that there was something ahead that he had in his heart for them, an inheritance. He bequeathed it to them and it would be a rest, a place of rest, so contrasting to everything that they had known in Egypt. When we move into the new covenant, we find that in and through the person of the Lord Jesus and under the umbrella and within the context of this new covenant, God has bequeathed to his people a rest.

Let me just read a few more verses here. I'll just break in in verse 8, for if Jesus, and that really should read Joshua, that's the same word, and he's referring back to the fact that of course that all of those people who came out of Egypt never did get into that promised rest. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, made the entire journey from Egypt into Canaan.

But the rest of them were held up in the wilderness under the judgment of God until they all died because of their unbelief. In fact you'll see that right in the text here. If you just look back into the third chapter, where we see a reference to them in the very last verse of the chapter, it says verse 19, so we see that they could not enter into that rest because of their unbelief.

And it was not Moses who led them into the land of Canaan eventually, but it was Joshua. He was, if you like, the Jesus. He was the saviour at that sense and in that limited way.

He was the one privileged to lead them in. And so the writer says, for if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. At that point he's actually referring back to a statement made by David in one of his Psalms, I believe 95.

And David makes a reference to this particular day, another day. And so the writer of the Hebrews is wanting to make this point. Yes, God was promising a rest and did promise a rest for the ancient people, which by and large they didn't experience because of their unbelief.

But the next up and coming generation, together with those two men mentioned, they did inherit that land. And what the writer is saying here to these Hebrew Christians who are aware of the Old Testament and of these records, he said, now if that had completed their entering into Canaan, had completed all that was in the heart of God when he promised a rest to his people, he argues then why did David speak of another day when he came on the scene far later than Joshua? And this is what he said. So then, this is his conclusion, verse 9, there remains to this day, there remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

This former prophetic statement of God never found its consummation by the children of Israel entering into Canaan. But he's saying now, verse 10, for he that is entered into his rest, God's rest, he also has ceased from his own works as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Amen. What he's saying here is that he that's entered into this rest of God, this fuller, more complete significance of the concept of rest, he, whoever it is, he's saying this to those Christians he was writing to, I believe the Holy Spirit's saying it to men and women today, he's saying these things to you and to me today. He that has entered into this rest, his rest, the rest of God, whoever he or she is, has also ceased from their own works.

I've been talking about a religion of works, outward activities, efforts to produce holiness of our own strength. He said he ceased from that. Cessation from our own works is the promise extended to each one of us as a focal feature of this rest that remains to this day for the people of God.

It will be an end to that moral code of ethics. It will be an end to the commandments imposed upon people with unregenerate hearts. It will be an end of their slavish duty to keep the commandments of God.

It will be an end. It will be a cessation to human attempts to attain holiness, which is impossible, but it will be an end to it all. Amen.

It will be an end, can I say this? It will be an end and an abolition to that which I've called a Christian religion, that trying to copy the Christ of history, that struggle to stop sinning, that crippling knowledge of failure. And here lies the radical contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, or at least this is one focal feature of that contrast, and that is that the Old Covenant sees sins plural. The New Testament sees sin singular.

Reread the book of Romans. Paul understood this very, very plainly. It was not merely that man was sinning and he couldn't help but sin, but God made a sacrificial system work for the time then present, which provided forgiveness for their sins.

But the New Covenant, through the redeeming life of Christ and the shedding of his better blood than the blood of bulls and of goats, provides the very power of the Holy Spirit to break the slavery of man to sin. He breaks the chains that bind the heart. Hallelujah.

And let's just keep this very simple and very clear in our minds. So the Old Covenant was, with its sacrificial system, provided forgiveness for sins. The New Covenant, through Jesus Christ and his redeeming work, breaks the power of sin.

Amen. Another fascinating thing in reading our scriptures, and we know that we're reading as a whole, we believe this, what Paul said to Timothy, that it's all scriptures given by inspiration of God, but it's the product of different writers who were inspired by God. And it's wonderful to see how they were all saying the same thing as I read through the New Testament here.

They're saying the same thing, but they're expressing it in different ways. Sometimes we fall into the trap of making separate experiences out of different phrases or different concepts and lay traps for ourselves. But think of it this way, and let me just give you an example.

It was John the Baptist, the man who was sent from God, who made the statement concerning the one who would follow him, the one whose shoelaces he was unworthy to unloose. He said, I'm baptizing you with water, but he who's coming after me, he will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And it was Jesus, we read this in Acts chapter one, he refers back to John the Baptist and what John had said, this quote I've just given to you.

And Jesus on that occasion, after his resurrection, he authenticates that, he said that was exactly right what John said. And then Jesus went on to say that that which had been forecast or prophesied by John the Baptist would be fulfilled not many days hence. And that was clearly a reference to what took place as is recorded in the next chapter of Acts, Acts chapter two, when suddenly there was this sound of a rushing mighty wind coming from heaven and so forth and so on.

That was clearly the outworking of Jesus' ministry, which John said Jesus was coming to make possible, to accomplish. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost and fire. Jesus is saying, okay, get ready, it's going to happen.

It's going to happen just round the next corner, that's of course. Amen. And Paul then in writing, he would say, and I've already quoted this text from Galatians 2.20, he would say, I am crucified with Christ, yet nevertheless I live.

But it's not really me that's living, it's Christ who lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. He would also write in Romans chapter eight, that the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

And now the writer to the Hebrews is saying, there remains a rest for the people of God. And he said, those who enter into it will cease from their own works, their own efforts, as God did when he had finished his work. Amen.

If we just play that back in our minds, we're saying that these writers, these speakers, they're all saying the same thing, but they're describing it differently. Entering into this rest involves the death of Christ. It involves being a spiritual experience for men and women of being baptised into the death of Christ, as Paul will state it.

And it's produced by the operation of God, the Holy Spirit. Amen. I hope that I'm making this as clear as it needs to be.

Amen. I'm trying to elevate the wonder of the new covenant in this one perspective. There are other perspectives that we could look at.

But what a wonderful thing. It comes to a head in my thinking with this simple statement of chapter four, verse nine of Hebrews, there remains a rest for the people of God. It was Charles Wesley who said on another occasion, I cannot rest in sins forgiven.

Where is the earnest of my heaven? That's what the new covenant is about. It's presenting the earnest of heaven. It's the down payment of a future consummation that God has in store for all of us who are truly his.

But we enter into the blessings of it today by his grace and by the power of God's Holy Spirit. What a wonderful thing. And this rest, just look into chapter four again.

I'll read the first verse. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. I want to just play on the word seem really.

Lest any of you should seem to come short of it. From that, I'm deducing this great idea that this promised rest actually works. This is not merely some pie in the sky, vague sort of religious text or statement.

But this is a promise of God, which God has made possible through the death of his son on the cross of Calvary and by the giving of the Holy Spirit and making the benefit of Calvary available to men and women such as you and me. And it works. Glory to God.

Little wonder that we heard Jesus saying that when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, Acts chapter one and verse eight, and from Luke 24, I'm thinking perhaps particularly, but he said that you're going to receive power from on high. There's going to be an endowment, an outpouring and an infilling of divine power, and you shall be witnesses unto me. Your life shall witness.

It's not merely that we'll all go around talking about the gospel. That's there somewhere. But the primary thing is that by this miracle, power and grace of God, there's a provision that will reconstitute us inwardly, spiritually, and give to us a new heart and a new enabling to be by our lives and through our lives a witness unto Jesus Christ, that the chains of sin will be smashed.

This is the gospel. And the soul life, the life that Jesus lived as a man will be manifest through our mortal bodies. It's taught very plainly and very simply.

Amen. The availability of this rest is right before us here. This rest remains.

What a thought. My brother Peter was saying something earlier in the opening of this meeting, and he was thanking God, and I've heard him do this many, many times, and he's sincere every time he does it, I know. But he thanks God and he's quoting a famous text from the Old Testament, or at least it's wrapped around it.

But he's thanking God for keeping him alive for such a time as this. But that God, and let me tell you this, beloved, I don't know who you are. I don't know what's going on in your life and experience.

But, you know, we all have an enemy and he's seeking to discourage and ruin and steal from us the richness of this great blessing of God, if he can, if we'll allow him. But what a wonderful thing that today, no matter what your life has been about in earlier days and earlier years, that as we're here right now, or

what your life is about in this moment for that matter, but the fact is that in the grace of God toward you, this blessed rest, someone referred to it centuries ago as the saint's rest, remains. It remains for you, my dear friend.

No one is excluded, as surely as you hear his word, I'm telling you it is available for you. You know, there are some people who teach today, many people as a matter of fact, who teach that well all of these kinds of things that I'm referring to and so much more that scripture teaches, it's all done, it's all provided, all you need to do is just believe it. You know, just, I'm plucking out some words, I think taking them then out of context is, it's just know this, reckon this, and that's that.

It's all true in you. It was A. W. Tozer who once, he cautioned against what he called logical deductions drawn from proof texts. The fact is, truth, truth that is presented in scripture, truth that the Holy Spirit quickens in our hearts as we read the scripture and we're exposed to the scripture, truth must be understood.

We need to hear, how shall they hear without a preacher? Because faith comes by hearing the word of God. The word of God ministered by the Spirit of God brings light to our understanding and it quickens faith within us. It reminds me, as I'm saying this, of not Charles Wesley but John Wesley who had a struggle with these very things that we're talking about.

But there's one, I'm seeing James Laney here in the meeting. I've known him in different locations but I'm thinking of, he reminds me of Chicago. And I remember being in Chicago many years ago now and someone gave me a little cassette recording that had been made by the Moody Bible Institute and it was a series that they were doing on important people from Christian history.

But they were sort of playing, it was all on audio but they were acting it out. And I'm thinking of one moment in that recording that was given to me while I was there and it was a recording that was, this is how it was, it was John Wesley sitting in a meeting and he was hearing something which to all intents and purposes seemed very dry. He was hearing the preface to the book of Romans by Martin Luther.

And in this recording you could hear John Wesley speaking to himself and you can hear his responses. I can't quote all that was part of this but he's listening and he's listening and then he says, I see it. You know, as we used to say in England, I don't think we do it anymore, the penny dropped, the light went on.

Faith gave him sight and it was quickened in his own heart. He goes around, he leaves that meeting, he goes right around to Charles Wesley's house. Charles Wesley's upstairs in bed from the street, he calls to him, Charles, Charles, he wakes him up.

Charles opens the window, looks out and John's in the street and he says, Charles, I've got it, I've got it. There remains therefore a rest to the people of God and it's not automatically mine but it's got my name on it and it's got your name on it but it's got to be acted upon. This gives no merit to us, it's all of God's grace, it's all of God but he is the one who's revealing it to us, he's made it possible.

Now he's revealing it to us by his Spirit who is visiting us individually. He's quickening the truth of it in our hearts. All I have to do is just open to it with all my heart.

That's the action that's called for. I don't have to, it's not going to be earned by my effort or by me doing anything. I just say, I don't say anything for that matter.

I just open my heart to God and insofar as I do that, I can actually allow the experience of it to flood into my heart. Without that response, the provision is irrelevant to me and that's the big concern. So we don't want to go around telling people, well it's all done, just believe it, okay, pray this little prayer, now you're saved, now you've got it, now you've got everything, off you go.

It can be so deceptive and so misleading to us and is to so many people. Amen. You know, if I was to receive an email from someone and it indicates that they're making a bank transfer to me of \$10,000, just imagine that, wow.

So with that, I can be so excited about it, I can rush to the rest of my family and I can say, listen to this, you know, I've just received \$10,000. You know, I could get that email and for weeks, for decades, I could study that email and read about this amazing gift and this provision that has been made for me. It's got my name on it here.

You know, I could go to church, I could stand up in church and tell everyone about this, I mean, we wouldn't do this of course, tell them about this marvellous email that we've received and just how exciting this is. If I was a preacher, I could stand up in the pulpit and preach about this amazing provision, but you know what, beloved? It's not mine until I take action. It's a very simple act under those circumstances, but it's not as simple as this and the benefit is not to be measured with the amount of money I just referred to.

Glory to God. Be sure, my dear friend, whoever you are, that you are not merely a hearer of this truth, but be a doer, a doer who responds with their whole heart. Amen.

You know, if what I've, I think, but I'll put it a different way, I've shared with you what I believe is the truth of the gospel. It's not everything, but it's a narrow field, but it's a core issue of the truth of the gospel. If it's resonating in your heart as you've been listening to me, I believe that faith is being quickened in your heart to respond and to receive this blessing.

I want to encourage you, I couldn't encourage you too strongly, invite the Holy Spirit to bring you into this rest that is remaining for you as a man or a woman of the company of the people of God. Amen. I've asked him if Bob is, I hope Bob's back again, I don't know if he is or not, I've asked him if he will sing to us a hymn, another one of Charles Wesley's.

If, perhaps just before he does, if I could just say this on a different note, I never know where this fits in, but you know, if some of, I know that there'll be many of you listening to me who don't know anything about me at all, and I've written just a little brief, referred to a bio, we never called it that when I was younger, and it's on our website, and you know, if you're interested, do check it out. The address of the website is quite simply mackenziefellowship.com. Someone had trouble getting there because they were spelling Mackenzie, M-A-C, but it's not M-A-C, it's M-C-K. Mackenziefellowship.com. And if this ministry is a help and a blessing to you, do let us know one way or the other, because we appreciate the comments and the encouragement.

So God bless you. I'm handing over back to Pete or to Bob, whoever's going to take it from here. Amen.

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