

More On The New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews is convinced of the superior ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus and the New Covenant are superior to the Law and the Old Covenant. But what about the Old Covenant, and the old promises and the old sacrifices and the old sanctuary and the old priesthood? All of these things pointed to Jesus. The Lord Jesus took on flesh, became a human being to defeat the power of death, to redeem humanity, cleanse sin and confront and destroy evil. Jesus came so we could have life more abundant, and freedom. Our Jesus understands our weakness and provides grace so that we can be faithful to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus provides a superior revelation and a superior salvation. Our superior priest (Jesus) ministers in a superior place (heaven). Jesus is the author of a New Covenant—and the promises of this New Covenant are superior—more excellent—far better—than those of the Old Covenant. We have a new deal with God. We are promised sufficient grace (vv.6-9). We are promised an inner change (v.10). We are promised unlimited blessing (v.11). We are promised cleansing for sin (v.12).

Imagine you are a professional athlete. You have an agent. It is your agent's job to negotiate the best deal possible with the new organization. You would like to know does this organization offer superior benefits? What benefits might a professional athlete be looking for? Better salary? Better benefits? Better security?

Now imagine you are sinner. I know it doesn't require much imagination. You want to have a right relationship with God. You want to go to heaven instead of hell. You have failed miserably at being "religious". You have had bad experiences with religion, church, and church people. You are not good at keeping the rules. Yet there is a conspicuous absence of peace in your life. The void inside of you is growing larger, deeper, darker. You need a Savior. You need someone who will negotiate a deal for you with God. Jesus invites you to consider Him.

What is it that you bring to the table? What is it that Jesus brings to the table?

Jesus brings a contract. Jesus assures you a better deal based on better promises. The new contract is contrasted with the old terms that were offered in the past. In the old contract you agreed to the old contract's terms. In the New contract you agree to the New contracts' terms. What makes the new contract better? Your agent knows that you are notorious bad boy or bad girl. You will require grace. Lots of grace. You have a hard heart. You will need a new heart. You have experienced limited blessings—and are now offered unlimited blessing. You have experienced the setting aside—or the postponing of punishment for sin—but are now offered a full pardon, not just having your sins—covered but cleansed. Sins—forgiven and forgotten forever!

But what's the catch? You must love and serve your agent. Your agent signs the contract—not with your blood—but His blood.

The New Emphasis: Grace (vv.6-9)

Hebrews 8:6–13 (NKJV) *6But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

Look at the word 'mediator'. It occurs in verse 5; here in verse 6; again in chapter 9:15 and again in chapter 12:24. The Greek scholar Thayer explains the meaning as "one who intervenes between two, either in order make or restore peace and friendship, or to form a compact, or for ratifying a covenant."

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Jesus is the one—through His death—restores peace and harmony between God and man. Human beings broke that harmony through sin and rebellion. The word was widely used in the Greek legal and business world. The word—*mesites*—finds its roots in *mesos*—*middle*—and *so middleman*. A man who stands in the middle. The scholar William Barclay discusses the two roles the Mediator played—as arbiter—and both Greeks and Romans devoted a great deal of time to this legal role. The arbiter was the person whose duty it was to wipe out the differences between the estranged parties—and this is exactly what Jesus does for us! The second meaning was a sponsor—or a person who guarantees—in the sense—of grievance—that a person will make good! Imagine you are accused of a crime—that involves debt. The sponsor agrees to guarantee the debt. Jesus guarantees our debt to God!

7For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

8Because 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—

Pause. What is going on in the text? The author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34.

The passage begins; “Because finding fault with them”—not finding fault with the Law or even the Old Covenant but rather finding fault with them! The problem was not in the Law or the Old Covenant but the with Jewish people’s failure to obey the Law and honor the promises.

Did God make an impossible standard for a sinful people to follow? No. The standard God has always required is perfection.

“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.”

Six times in verses 8-13 the Lord says; “I will”.

- v.8 “I will make a new covenant”
- v.10 “I will make with the house of Israel”
- v.10 “I will put My laws in their mind”
- v.10 “I will be their God”
- v.12 “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness”
- v.12 “I will remember no more”

The moment the Lord says; “I will” he makes a promise. The moment He makes a promise He must keep His promise. Remember promises fall into two categories; conditional and unconditional. The Old Covenant’s focus—what man must do. The Covenant’s focus—what God will do!

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This is grace. Just like Noah who found grace in the eyes of the Lord—the Lord decides to act in grace. The Old Covenant—and its standard—was a yoke of bondage rightly demanding perfect obedience. The Old Covenant insisted that the people do something for God. Now the New Testament—the New Covenant insists that God will do something for you—in Christ. The emphasis is on what God will do for His people.

The fault was not in the Covenant or in the Law but rather in the people's failure to obey the Law. The Law is spiritual—people are carnal—we are “sold under sin” (Rom.7:14) and the Law was “weak through the flesh”. The problem was not God's standard or the weakness of the revelation of God concerning the Law—the problem was human nature—human weakness.

This is why grace—real grace—unmerited grace—pure favor—must step in. What the Law could never do—because of man's weakness—God will do—through Calvary's Cross. In order for human beings to be saved—it will require a spiritual intervention on the part of God in Christ.

This is amazing grace. This is unchanging love. That you would take my place. That you would bear the Cross. You will lay down your life. That I might be set free.

Grace is God's special favor freely given to undeserving people.

D.L Moody—“The Law tells me how crooked I am. Grace comes along and straightens me out.”

9not 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.

What was that covenant?

Exodus 19:5; “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Did the Jewish people honor God's covenant? The Jewish people agreed to God's terms; but then failed to honor the Covenant. The Lord says; “they did not continue in My covenant and I disregarded them, says the Lord.”

The New Contract: Written In Our Hearts (v.10)

10For 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.

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What is this new deal and what does it involve? “After those days”—after the days of Israel’s disobedience—God will put His law in their minds—so they will know Him—and in their hearts—so they will love Him!

Dear in their hearts—near—in proximity—“I will be their God”.
In the Old Testament—the repeated warning—stand back—stand at a distance—but in the New Testament—come close—draw near. The Law says—stand back. Grace says—draw near!

In the past Moses wrote God’s Law on tablets of stone, but now God writes His Word on our Hearts through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Prophet Jeremiah sees into the future. He sees a time when the Messiah comes. One of the blessings of Messiah’s future Kingdom is a heart righteousness—God would put His law inside the hearts of men. How would He do this? The prophet Ezekiel wrote (36:27) “I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes”.

Paul alludes to this in 2 Corinthians 3:1-3; “Do we begin to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.”

Paul in effect sees himself as God’s secretary writing the Word of God into the lives of God’s people. He reveals the truth that every single Christian is an epistle of Christ—being read by all men.

You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithful or true.
Just what is the Gospel according to you?

In the New Covenant we are not our own. We belong to the Lord Jesus. We are employed by Him. We possess what He possesses.

The New Witness: Widespread Salvation (v.11)

11None 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.

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Does this teach universal salvation? No. I think what the writer is saying that a time will come when the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ will be universal. This will come to full fruition in what has been called the Millennial Kingdom.

Imagine a world where Jesus has returned and occupies the throne of His father David.

“all shall know Me” finds a similar statement by the Prophet Isaiah (11:9) “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God”.

The New Standing: Wonderful Cleansing (v.12)

12For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

What happened to sin in the Old Covenant? What happens to sin in the New Covenant?

In the next chapter the writer reminds the reader there was a remembrance made of sins but no remission of sins. The blood of bulls and goats could cover sin—but only the blood of Jesus—the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—could cleanse sin—take away sin.

Think of this promise: The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin! Our sin is forgiven. Our sin is forgotten.

What a blessing! What a promise! Jesus is your sin bearer. You can lay down your sin burden.

In Christ—grace. In Christ—mercy! The Law required “Every transgression and disobedience received a just reward” (Hebrews 2:2). In the Law—and the Laws regarding sacrifice—there was atonement—covering—but in Christ—cleansing. The sacrifices outlined and prescribed in the law made a man ceremonially clean—that is it qualified him to participate in the religious life of the nation. But the cleansing was external, it did not touch a person’s heart. It did not provide moral cleansing or a clear conscience.

Do you want a new heart?

The New Covenant: Working Now (v.13)

13In 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.

The very fact that He (God’s Holy Spirit) says “A new covenant,” means the first covenant is obsolete.

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When did this “new covenant” begin? Our first clue is found in Luke 22:20; “Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” The second clue is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 where Paul writes; “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; (24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” (25) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

Blood. The New Covenant—eternal—was established by the shedding of Christ’s blood on Calvary’s Cross. Later the writer (12:24) declares Jesus is the mediator of this New Covenant.

Wait—wait—someone might say—doesn’t Jeremiah 31:31 apply to the Jew? The New Covenant was promised to the Jew! What right do we have to appropriate it for ourselves? Didn’t God offer the Kingdom to the Jews? When Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven—when the Holy Spirit came upon the Believer’s in the upper room—the New Covenant was in full force. But Israel for the most part resisted the message, resisted the Spirit of God, refused the Gospel and the nation was set aside. And God by His Holy Spirit extended the message and the gospel to the Gentiles and to the whole of humanity. Paul understood that God created one new man—uniting both saved Jew and Gentile into the body of Christ and both share in this New Covenant. But the nation Israel—for the moment—must wait—a little longer. When will the Jewish people fully and finally embrace their Savior? When the times of the Gentiles cease—when the Church is removed—when the nation of Israel “looks upon Him whom they have pierced” and the future Kingdom is established (Zech.12:10; see Warren Wiersbe Outlines in the New Testament; pp. 698-699).

The writer uses the image of something growing old, temporal, fading. Both “old” and “vanish away” come from the same root word (*palaiōo—adjective—palaios—in existence a long time—antiquated worn out*). When the author uses the term twice—old—ready to vanish away—the new has replaced the old—the outdated is updated—God outdated the Old—and God updated the New. God has cancelled the Old—made it invalid. We might think of this as made obsolete and therefore becoming obsolete. **The Old Covenant delivered by Moses—at Sinai—obsolete—the New Covenant—delivered by Jesus—at Calvary’s Cross—in His blood—sustained by grace—eternal.**

Obsolete—growing old—(*gerasko—only here and John 21:18—noun geras—old age*).

Why turn back to the Law? Why go back to the temporal? Why embrace the Old? The temple was about “to vanish away”.

Some conservative Bible scholars place the writing of Hebrews sometime after 64 AD but before 68 AD.

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In 66 AD several legions led by Titus and Vespasian were headed for the Galilee and Judea. The Jewish revolt would result in widespread damage and death. The Temple was about to be destroyed.

Judaism was about to change fundamentally.

The Jewish Temple will be destroyed—the priestly system of sacrifice will cease—but Jesus will live—and live forever—and His sacrifice will suffice forever. The New Covenant like the Priesthood of Jesus—will go into the future and endure forever.

Conclusion

Jesus guarantees your debt.

Jesus gives you grace.

Jesus gives you a new heart.

Jesus gives you a new birth.

The old agreement was mediated by Moses. The new agreement is mediated by Jesus.

The old agreement was ruined by Israel's sin. The old agreement was chiseled on rocks.

The new agreement was restored by Jesus's sacrifice. The new agreement is written on living hearts.

I heard the story of a little boy who grew up in a very poor home. He had an accident was taken to a hospital. After he was made comfortable the nurse brought him a great big glass of milk. He looked at longly but would not pick it up. He rarely saw so much—and when he did he had to share it with brothers and sisters. When he did receive milk in a glass—it was only partly full—and always shared. The young boy looked at the nurse and said, "How deep may I drink?" The nurse said, "Drink it all. There's more."

Imagine you bought a homeless person dinner. You might be tempted to call that grace. But imagine that same homeless person beat you up—and then you bought him dinner. That's grace.