

The New and Better Covenant of Christ Part I

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 8:6-13

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. 7For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. 8For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: 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 continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. 10For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: 11And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. 12For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. 13In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Baptists have always been known as a people of the New Covenant. They have bled and died for their conviction that no law binds the Christian but the law of the New Testament. Dr. B.H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was a leading Southern Baptist in the last half of the nineteenth century. He said this concerning Baptists and their commitment to the New Testament or New Covenant:

The New Testament is the only law of Christianity. Doubtless many of my fellow Christians of other denominations may be disposed to smile at the announcement of this as a distinctive Baptist principle, but let us not smile too soon. Patiently await the development of the thought to expand the statement all the New Testament is the law of Christianity. The New Testament will always be all the law of Christianity. This does not deny the inspiration or prophet of the Old Testament, nor that the New is a development of the Old. It affirms however that the Old Testament is a typical (and the word typical here means typology). The Old Testament as a typical educational and transitory system was fulfilled by Christ and as a standard of law and way of life was nailed to the cross of Christ and so taken out of the way.

Carroll goes on to explain,

The principle teaches that we should not go to the Old Testament to find Christian law or Christian institutions. Not there do we find the true idea of the Christian church, or its members, or its ordinances, or its government, or its officers, or its sacrifices, or its worship, or its mission, or its ritual, or its priesthood. Now when we consider the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christendom today, whether Greek, Romanist, or Protestant, borrow from the Old Testament so much of their doctrine of the church, including its members, officers, rituals, ordinances, government, liturgy, and mission, we may well call this a distinctive Baptist principle.

In other words, Dr. Carroll is saying that of all denominations and groups that call themselves Christian, Baptists have been historically the only group that refuses to borrow from the Old Testament and try to bring it into the New. We have always been a people of the New Covenant and the New Covenant only. Now I believe in the perpetuity of God's church. That simply means that once the Lord established His church, there have always been a people whom He has called His beloved. And throughout all the ages, Christ has had a remnant of believers who were guided by a higher law than found in the Old Covenantal period, who have followed the law of Christ. The apostles called it the law of love and no nobler precept has ever been issued. Our Lord came forth as the lawgiver that Moses was only a type and foreshadowing of. Christ is our lawgiver. The Law of Moses was sealed by the blood of bulls and goats, but the blood of the New Covenant was sealed by the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. And before going to that cross to spill His precious blood, His covenant-sealing blood, our Savior instituted the sign of the covenant which is the cup of the vine which tonight we will be celebrating. He said to His disciples gathered around that table, and to all disciples gathered around their tables throughout the centuries, that this cup "is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you, and as oft" as we disciples drink of it "we do show the Lord's death till He comes." It is the holy illustration of the sealing of a new and better covenant.

Now some would take us back to a lesser day and give us a lesser hope than we now have in this New Covenant. They preach that we are under the obligations of the Ten Commandments, and many a good gospel preacher has gone this way. Like Bunyan's Pilgrim, he has departed the path of good news and has climbed the treacherous hills of Mount Sinai following the advice of one Mr. Worldly Wiseman. I can remember times in days gone by when I too have thundered to my hearers that they must obey the law in order to have peace with God. Surely we are to be lawful and we're to walk in the commandments of God, but those commandments of God do not bring us to God or to peace with God. Nor does a good Christian find the law of God grievous or a burden. The house of Mr. Legality is no place for a true Christian to dwell. And yet we who preach to others often send men and women, as Mr. Worldly Wiseman did Pilgrim, to Mount Sinai to Legality and say this is the way to work out your salvation by your own works. We tell them that they are under the terror of Sinai and its laws. But the New Testament Christian does not live by the thundering and lightning of Sinai, we are a people of Mount Zion which is a different covenant, not a covenant of stone tablets, but a covenant written by the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men and women. Our law is liberty, not liberty to sin, but liberation from sin and the flesh. The law of the Old Covenant constrains men to sin, but the law of the New Covenant sets men free from the dominion of sin so that they can be righteous.

This text is crucial to our times. Many seem to want to blur the distinctions between the two covenants and make some hybrid out of the two. Some want to find something in the middle and not as extreme as God wanted the New Covenant to be. Others want us to believe that the New Testament is simply a continuation of the Old Testament and therefore support their bringing into the New Testament their Old Testament sacraments. Advocates of covenantal theology see continuity between the Covenants that defends their practice of infant baptism. They, who believe the Old Covenant continues in the New, teach that baptism replaces circumcision, and therefore babies should be baptized, since babies were circumcised under the Old Covenant. Brothers and sisters, I do see some continuity between the covenants, but not to the degree that others have suggested. The Old is not continued in the New; it's obsolete and has vanished away. Therefore, it is necessary, I think, that we deal with this subject. It is necessary that we be truly be New Testament in our Christianity. And so today I want to speak on the thought, "The New and Better Covenant of Christ." We have a new and better covenant and we are a people of that covenant.

There are several reasons in which the New Covenant is better than the Old and I want to propose a few from this text alone this morning. First of all, the writer of Hebrews, is saying that the New Covenant is a better covenant because it's based upon better promises. I refer you to verse six of our text. He says,

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

The New Covenant is established upon promises that are eternal in their existence and in their nature. Whereas the Old Covenant is based upon promises that are temporal and are not eternal, that cannot change the heart of a sinner. And dear friend, if you're not a Christian this morning that is the most desperate of all needs you have and will ever have, you need your heart changed. Your heart has to be changed, and the promises of the Old Covenant cannot do that.

Now let's first of all look at the recipients of the promises of each of these covenants. To whom was the Old Covenant promised and to whom was the New Covenant promised? First of all, the recipient of the promises of the Old Covenant was Israel. God made a covenant with a nation. The promise of the Old Covenant was binding on both God and Israel, and so you could say it was a bilateral covenant, meaning that both parties of the covenant had something they had to fulfill. God had to keep His word, and the people of Israel had an obligation to keep the covenant. So it's a bilateral covenant. Now the promise that the Old Covenant is based upon is found in Exodus chapter nineteen and verse five. Basically the promise, the foundational promise of the Old Covenant is this, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5). God's promise to Israel was this: You obey my law and I will bless you, period. But if you violate my covenant, I will curse you. That's the promise of the Old Covenant.

Now let's look at the recipients of the promise of the New Covenant. First of all, I want you to understand about Jesus Christ is a recipient of the promise of the New Covenant. Little is discussed in theology that Jesus as a recipient of the New Covenant, but He is. The writer of Hebrews has established this for us already. In Hebrews chapter seven, verses twenty through twenty-two Jesus Christ was made a promise upon which the New Covenant would be founded way before God ever created humanity. In Hebrews chapter seven, verse twenty it says, And inasmuch as not without an oath [he was made priest]: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) (Hebrews 7:20-21). The promise that God the Father made with Jesus Christ that He would be a high priest, is the foundational cornerstone of the New Covenant. What need would there have been for Jesus to be a high priest, that is a mediator, if there was no people that He was to mediate for. He has to have a people to mediate for. And who are the people that He is the mediator for? It's the people of the New Covenant. Paul, in the book of Galatians, again stresses the point that to Christ also was this promise that the Father made to His Son that He was going to redeem a people for Christ whom He would present to Christ as His bride. In Galatians three, fifteen, he says, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." But Paul makes a distinction, notice the distinction, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed," and then he explains who that seed is, "which is Christ." The promise that God made with Abraham is a reiteration of a promise that he made long ago before that, to His own Son, that Christ would be the heir of the New Covenant. And because we are joint heirs with Him, we too enjoy the blessings of this New Covenant. Verse seventeen states, "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." The Old Testament covenant could not break or violate or end this promise between the Father and the Son or even to Abraham.

Now, there are second recipients of the promise. Not only Jesus Christ is a recipient of the New Covenant, but the Bible also tells us that all who through faith believe the promise are also recipients of the New Covenant. Romans chapter four and verse thirteen, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law." In other words, God did not say to Abraham, if you keep my law then you can be my seed, you can be a part of the New Covenant; but through the righteousness of faith, all those who believe in Jesus Christ by faith are made participants of this wonderful new covenant, the covenant of salvation. Now this promise includes both Jews and Gentiles, which makes this a better covenant, because the Old Covenant was promised to only Israel. That was not to say that Gentiles could not be saved under the Old Covenant if they would become proselytes, and some did, but the promise was to Israel and to Israel alone. But in Romans chapter four, verse sixteen, the Bible says, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law," that means Jews, "but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." Dear friend, the truth is that the New Covenant is better because it includes us. Unless you are a natural Jewish descendant of Jacob, you were the

only one who had hope of salvation until this covenant. But with the coming of this covenant, all the nations of the world can be blessed. The promise that all the nations would be blessed by the seed of Abraham is a truth reiterated in the New Covenant.

It is through faith that we become participators in this wonderful covenant. It's open to you today, and it's open not based upon the restrictions of you joining a church, or you adopting some religious system, it is open only unto all who believe. The requirement of the Gospel is simple: repent and believe. Trust with your heart that Jesus is the Savior that can deliver you from sin. Trust that when He died on that cross He paid your penalty for sin, not just the sins of the world, but He paid your penalty. Trust it. And if you will trust that, I can guarantee upon the authority and the promise of the New Covenant you can be saved. Trust. Turn from your sins and God says He'll place you into the kingdom of the New Covenant. It's open to all. How many of you today who are sitting here know that at the moment of death there is no guarantee for you. There's an open invitation.

There are some who would scoff and say that I am at this moment being unfaithful to the Gospel in making an open invitation to you because the Gospel is only for the elect. I do believe the elect will be the only ones saved. Nobody will ever be saved apart from the gracious choice of God, but dear friend, the Gospel is to all who would believe and respond. And therefore, that does not remove your responsibility today to heed its truth. You must repent. You must believe. This New Covenant provides to you access to God if you would but do those two things: repent and trust in Christ. Ah, this is a better covenant because it's thrown the doors open to all peoples of all the world. This is the thrust and importance of missions. We are a people of the New Covenant, which extends to the four corners of the earth. Thus, the purpose of missions is to proclaim the excellent gospel so that the people of the earth might glory in God and enjoy Him as we get to enjoy Him as participators in this New Covenant.

The promise includes both Jews and Gentiles. But I want to be honest to the text. Go back to Hebrews chapter eight. The promise is to the house of Israel and Judah. In Hebrews chapter eight and verse eight it says,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Hebrews 8:8).

Gentiles are not mentioned in this New Covenant. The covenant was made with Israel. How can I have the audacity to say now the doors are opened to all who would but believe, Jew or Gentile? Salvation was ordained to come through the descendants of Abraham. But God promised Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and that he would become the father of many nations. Paul developed that thought in Romans chapter four and also in Galatians. He says that all Gentile believers become sons of Abraham. The moment you are saved by placing your faith in Christ, you become a son of Abraham. God's promise to Abraham was as much a spiritual promise as it was physical. So that as Abraham was an example of faith, we become like Abraham when we put our faith in Christ. "Like father, like son." Paul tells

us in Ephesians three that his ministry to the Gentiles was to reveal the mystery of the New Covenant. Specifically he says, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:4-5). What was the mystery of Christ? Verse six, “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6).

Now, let’s move quickly to what was promised in each covenant and see that the New Covenant is much better than the Old because of what’s promised in it. First, the promises of the Old Covenant were temporal blessings. The promises of the first covenant presented blessings for this present life. God said if Israel obeyed, He would give them health, wealth, and success. He would bless in seed time in harvest, and in national privileges. But all these blessings are of a temporal nature. But the blessings of the New Covenant are eternal blessings. The writer of Hebrews makes it absolutely clear in Hebrews seven and verse nineteen that the Old Covenant could not save one soul. Those Ten Commandments can’t save you. Don’t put your faith in them, they’ll damn you. Do you reply, “You mean if I try to keep the Ten Commandments, I’m sure to be damned?” Absolutely, if that’s the means by which you think you can have access to God. But the promise of the New Covenant is eternal. In the New Covenant the promise is life eternal. And its emphasis is on the spiritual rather than the temporal physical blessings of this life.

Now let me digress for a few moments and say it’s important that this is clear. A lot of modern theology today is doing what I said earlier, confusing the Old and New Covenants and trying to bring the Old into the New. Any time a preacher says to you, if you will simply obey God and have enough faith, God will give you health, wealth, and success, he is trying to bring the Old Covenant blessings into the New Covenant. The New Covenants blessings are spiritual, not physical. Although there are some physical blessings that come with it, that’s not the primary emphasis. When someone says to you, if you’ll just have enough faith, you’ll have a big bank account, you’ll never be sick, and you’ll always be successful, what he has done is misunderstood that there’s a new covenant and the old is gone. He’s confusing the two. It is not New Testament preaching when we try to combine a dead covenant with a living covenant. So beware. There is no New Testament doctrine that promises if you have enough faith you’ll never ever be sick, and you’ll always be wealthy, and everything you touch will be successful. The New Testament is built upon something much better than just physical and temporal blessings. It’s upon eternal and spiritual blessings. That which is physical is not lasting. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” We’ve got something much better than physical health, wealth and success. I have the promise that when I die and leave this old body that I shall not really die but be very much alive. Sickness never again will plague me. They didn’t have such a promise in the Old Covenant. You could have obeyed the Old Testament and still not necessarily have eternal life. The power of eternal life is not in the Old. It has always been by faith through grace. Always!

Let us move to another reason why the New Covenant is a better covenant. Secondly, I believe the New Covenant is a better covenant because of its perfection. The Old Covenant was not

perfect. It was not perfect especially in regards to salvation. Look again at our text, Hebrews chapter eight, verse seven,

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second (Hebrews 8:7).

What does he mean here, faultless? You mean that there was something wrong with God's covenant? Could God issue something out of his mouth that would be faulty? No. But something is lacking in the Old Covenant and he tells us in the previous chapter, Hebrews seven, eighteen, what it is. He says, "For there is verily a disannulling," that means a removal, a ceasing, "of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof." In other words, the Old Covenant, including its ten commandments and all of its sacrifices and services of the temple and tabernacle, were weak and unprofitable. Weak? God commanded it. Unprofitable? God gave it by angels. How could something through the medium of an angel be unprofitable? The answer is, it could not perfect the soul unto salvation.

Its weakness and liability was twofold. Number one, its liability was that it was a shadow of the reality. We talked about shadows last week. When I want shade I don't look for shadows, I look for a tree that casts a shadow. No tree, no shade. There's nothing in that shadow, there's no substance. It's in the reality that produces the shadow that I find relief. The Old Covenant was nothing more than a shadow. Hebrews chapter ten and verse one, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."

Now I'm going to say some things that some will call me blasphemous in saying, but it's what the writer is saying. Everything about the Old Covenant, including those ten, wonderful, glorious, and holy commandments was but a reflection of something real and better. Am I saying that we should not obey the Ten Commandments? I did not say that. Where there are eternal principles in those commandments, you'll find them in the New Testament. They were merely a reflection of the character and nature of God, but when Jesus Christ came to this earth in the form of a man, we no more had a shadow, a reflection, we had the real thing. You could look at Him and say, "there is God," no need for images. There is no murder, no dishonesty, no coveting, no adultery, no guile, nothing impure in Him. The Old Covenant, according to Paul, was nothing more than a shadow that pointed to Christ who is now our law. Christ is our law, believer, not the Ten Commandments, Christ. And in Him is the law of love. By Him and because He lives in me I don't murder. Under the Old Covenant I was forbidden to murder by trying to follow some rigid guideline. However, under the New Covenant, because the Spirit of Christ is in me, I have the law of love motivating me.

Today I fear we're missing it. I look out in the streets of Paducah and hardly can you go a block now without seeing the Ten Commandments in somebody's front yard. It's not those Ten Commandments that save us. Pastors and religious leaders are saying, "Oh if our society would just live by the Ten Commandments, and if our judges and our government would honor those Ten

Commandments, we'd be better off." Yes, we would. I don't argue that, I agree with you. But something is even better than the shadow---it's Christ revealed to us and in us.

Its second liability was its weakness to deal with sin and the sin nature of man. This was its biggest weakness. Once again look at Hebrews chapter eight and verse eight again. Notice with whom God finds fault. In Hebrews eight and verse seven, our author says, "if the first covenant had not been faultless there would have no place been found for the second." Is he saying that the word of God in the commandments were faulty? No. Notice who he actually finds fault with, verse eight,

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: 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 continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord (Hebrews 8:8-9).

The problem was not the law of God. What came out of God's mouth and was written on those tablets of stone was perfect, for God can do no less. But the problem with the Ten Commandments and the laws of the Old Covenant was they could not change the human heart, and when those laws were applied to the human heart, all that the human heart could do was break them. The law's liability or its weakness was that it could not ensure the obedience of the people. If we were under the Old Covenant and I said to you, you want to be saved, you want to be a Christian, you want your life changed, you want to know peace and contentment, you want to know happiness, you want to know joy like you've never experienced joy before, then keep the Ten Commandments. And if you tried to keep those Ten Commandments, I guarantee you, you would be the most miserable person on the earth; you would not find joy, you would find wrath, you'd find anger, you'd find frustration, you'd find more misery and more hopelessness than you now have. Why? Because all that the Ten Commandments would do would expose you to what you really are – a rebel against God.

This is exactly the Apostle Paul's argument in Romans chapter eight and verse three. The law of God issued in the Old Covenant was not imperfect or somewhat less holy or good. Far from it; it was perfect, it was holy, it just was not intended to do all things and that included saving a man. "For what the law could not do." Ah, the law could not do some things. It was not perfect in all things. Some things it could not do. What is it that it could not do? "In that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." How does God say then that His law is weak? He is simply saying that it was never designed to do certain things. It was never designed to save you. In your Bibles you read in Romans chapter seven and verse seven, "What shall we say then?" Paul is hearing the same question I'm hearing some of you say in your hearts and minds: "Wait a minute, I've never heard this before. I have always been taught that you've got to keep those laws, you've got to obey those laws. And now you're telling me there's something wrong with it." And Paul is saying, no I'm not, I'm not telling you that there is something wrong with the law. Paul continues his rebut-

tal, "Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" In other words, the law had a purpose. What's its purpose? The purpose of the law is to show your sin against God. "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." The law was given by God to expose us to what we really are, wicked haters of God. Take offense to that if you please, but that's exactly what you and I are. The law exposes us as such so that we might have hope today. The law was designed to show us that there's a cancer eating at your eternal soul that will damn it far worse than any physical ailment attacking your body. You've got to diagnose this thing, and that's what the law is for, to diagnose your sin and to show you what it is.

God said, "I've got ten things I don't want you to do." What does a man do when he is prohibited or told he can't do something? He does them. Somebody said when we laid the sod we ought to put up a sign: Do not walk on the grass. I asked, do you want them to walk on the grass? Put up a sign and they'll do it. Every kid in here will do it and about half of you adults. "Nobody is going to tell me I can't walk on the grass, I tithe here." That is what some would say because it's our nature to not want to have anybody rule us. We won't be told what to do. And I'm here to tell you this morning, friend, that the law of God was perfect, it's holy, but it was never designed to save you. It was designed to show you that you needed a Savior. The Old Covenant is to say, it can't be done here, but One has come who did do it, turn to Him, look and live.

Paul asks the question in Romans chapter seven and verse thirteen, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" No, Paul said, "God forbid. But sin," ah, there's the evil one, sin. He continues, "that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." God says, okay, I'm going to give you all the laws of the Old Covenant and show you just how wicked you are.

The Lord showed Israel how they could experience happiness, joy, peace, and contentment, and be the number one nation of all nations. What an opportunity. All they had to do was keep the Law and they could be the greatest empire the world has ever known. There would be no Palestinian wars and conflicts if the people under the Old Covenant had obeyed the covenant's law. But God gave them the Law to show them that neither they nor anyone else could obey it. And neither can you. Hear me. You can't either. I commend you for being here today if you're not a regular church goer. But not even being here today will make it easier for you on judgment day. The truth is it'll make it more difficult. You've heard the truth. The truth now stands and says, you heard it and you rejected it. It decries you as guilty and deserving of God's judgment. The best the Old Covenant could do was to show something better was needed.

That something better is Christ. I conclude with Galatians chapter three verse twenty-one, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." In other words, if keeping the Old Covenant law could have saved you, then the truth was you really didn't need Jesus. The Old Covenant law came to show you couldn't do it on your own and you need Him. You need

Him. Righteousness and peace can only come by Christ. What you need today is to see your need of a deliverer, one who can deliver you from sin. And it's been my heart and my task today to show you Jesus. Look to Him. Acknowledge your sin. The law exposes it. The prognosis has been given, death. But God extends mercy to all who will believe in the promise.

Father, do it today. We can only pray you would do it according to your mercy by your Spirit. Save that which is lost. And Lord, for the Christian who has been bound by Mr. Worldly Wiseman and Mr. Legality, been entangled in bondage once being set free, oh God, deliver them this morning. Let them once again know that Christ is their liberator, and that righteousness is only found in Him and not the works of their hands. I pray this in Christ. Amen.