



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Better Promises

Hebrews 8:6-13

August 30, 2009

⁶But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

⁸For he finds fault with them when he says:

‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,

⁹not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

For they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.

¹¹And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.

¹²For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.’

¹³In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

- ❖ One of the greatest and most comforting truths about Yahweh is that He is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

Puritan Thomas Shepherd writes, “What is a Christian’s comfort and where does it chiefly lie, but in this, that the Lord has made with him an everlasting Covenant, in all things established in sure.”

Another Puritan, Edward Pearse writes, “Oh, study this Covenant of God, and all the unchangeableness of it, and you will find it an unchangeable spring of comfort to you.”

- ❖ It is clear that throughout the Old Testament, God pursues His people always doing so through the instrument of *covenant*.
 - Yet, the concept of covenant is not just central to the Old Testament, but to all of Scripture.
 - In fact, it is impossible to truly understand the message of the Book of Hebrews apart from a solid understanding of the biblical concept of covenant.
- ❖ O. Palmer Robertson, in his work *The Christ of the Covenants*, writes, “When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. **A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.**”
- ❖ Thus, according to Robertson, a covenant has three characteristics: (1) a bond; (2) a bond in blood; and (3) it is sovereignly administered:
 - **A Covenant is a Bond.** It is always a person, either God or man, who makes a covenant. Still further it is another person who stands as the other party of the covenant with few exceptions. *The result of a covenant commitment is the establishment of a relationship ‘in connection with,’ ‘with,’ or ‘between’ people...A covenant commits people to one another.*”
 - **A Covenant is a Bond in Blood.** By initiating covenants, God never enters into a casual or formal relationship with man. Instead the implications of his bonds extend to the ultimate issues of life and death. The basic terminology describing the inauguration of covenantal relationship vivifies the life-and-death intensity of the divine covenants. The phrase translated ‘to make a covenant’ in the Old Testament literally reads ‘to cut a covenant.’ [from the Hebrew word *berith*]... The law, the prophets, and the writings all contain the phrase repeatedly.”
 - **A Covenant is Sovereignly Administered.** A covenant is a bond-in-blood *sovereignly administered*...No such thing as bargaining, bartering,

or contracting characterizes the divine covenants of Scripture. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth dictates the terms of his covenant.

- ❖ Consider the establishment and sealing of the Old Covenant [with blood] in **Exodus 24:3-8** shortly following the great act of salvation in the Old Testament – the Exodus from Egypt:

“³Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.’ ⁴And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ ⁸ **And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’**”

- ❖ **Yet, there is a Covenant that is greater the Mosaic (or the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, or Davidic)...it is the New Covenant, sealed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- ❖ **And it is the topic of the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old that the author of Hebrews now turns.**

- I. **The New Covenant was Promised**
- II. **The New Covenant is Superior**
 - a. **God will Implant the Law within His People**
 - b. **God’s People will Know Him**
 - c. **God will Forget their Sins**

I. The New Covenant was Promised

- ❑ It is imperative that the modern-day reader of the Book of Hebrews understand that **the idea of a New Covenant was never God’s “Plan B.”**
- ❑ The New Covenant was foreshadowed and promised throughout the Old Testament (beginning, truly, in Genesis 3:15).
- ❑ This point is clear, here in Hebrews 6:8. Quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34, the author of Hebrews writes:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
When I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
And with the house of Judah,
Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
On the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

- The prophet Jeremiah is writing during the 7th Century, B.C., over six hundred years prior to the birth of Christ.
- Consequently, the plan to send Jesus Christ was in place long before His birth in Bethlehem (and long before Jeremiah’s declaration as well!).
- Yet, not only this, but the new covenant was to be not just with Judah (the Southern Kingdom), but with Northern Kingdom Israel as well. **This truth demonstrated the all-encompassing nature of the New Covenant.** In fact, the author’s application of Jeremiah 31:31-34 here in the Book of Hebrews further demonstrates the fulfillment of the New Covenant promises in the life of the Church.

II. The New Covenant is Superior (to the Old)

- And the end of Verse 8, the author of Hebrews draws a clear comparison between the New Covenant and the one God made with the Israelites when He “took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”
 - This is a statement that clearly references the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (the *Old / Mosaic Covenant*) following the great salvific act of the Old Testament: the Exodus.
- Yet, the author’s primary point is to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old.
 - In **Hebrews 8:6**, the author writes, “But as it, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, *since it is enacted on better promises.*”
 - And so, the *reason why* the New Covenant is better than the Old is because the New Covenant “is enacted on better promises.”
 - So, this begs the question, “What are the promises?”
 - And certainly this is precisely the point of this text: to delineate the **better promises** of the New Covenant.

- The author states three promises which make the New Covenant superior to the Old: (1) The promise of the implanting of the Law *within* God’s people; (2) The promise that God’s people will know Him; and (3) The promise that God will forgive (and not remember) the sins of His people.
- Furthermore, these *superior* promises were spiritual and eternal in nature as opposed to the physical and temporary promises of the Old Covenant.

Nineteenth Century Presbyterian theologian Albert Barnes wrote, “The promises in the first covenant pertained *mainly* to the present life. They were promises of length of days; of increase of numbers; of seed time and harvest; of national privileges, and of extraordinary peace, abundance and prosperity. That there was also the promise of eternal life, it would be wrong to doubt; but this was not the main thing. In the new covenant, however, the promise of spiritual blessings become the *principal* thing. The mind is directed to heaven; the heart is cheered with the hopes of immortal life; the favor of God and the anticipation of heaven are secured in the most ample and solemn manner”

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- Then, the author of Hebrews writes, in **Verse 7**: “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.”
 - Yet, if the “Law of the LORD is perfect” and righteous, then how can it be *with fault*?
 - He explains in **Verse 8**: “For he [God] *finds fault with them* [the Old Covenant people of God...ethnic Israel].”
 - In other words, the faultiness of the Old Covenant lie, not in the Law itself, for it was perfect, but in the people with whom God made the Covenant.

F.F. Bruce comments, “The defect did not lie in the covenant-law; it was good in itself, but to borrow Paul’s language, ‘it was weakened by the flesh’ (Romans 8:3) – by the inadequacy of the human material which it had to work upon. What was needed was a new nature, a heart liberated from its bondage to sin, a heart which not only spontaneously knew and loved the will of God but had the power to do it.”

- In the original context of Jeremiah 31:31-34, the LORD states, in Verse 32, “...not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, *though I was their husband*...”
- The idea here, then, is that the people of Israel were the “bride” of Yahweh, just as the Church is the Bride of Christ. However, because of the sinfulness of the

people, they became to Yahweh an *unfaithful* wife, prostituting themselves with the false gods and idols of the surrounding pagan nations.

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- It is important to note that Jeremiah served as Prophet during the reign of King Josiah in a period of brief “revival” in the land of Judah. In the eighteenth year of King Josiah (c. 621 B.C.), Hilkiah the priest discovered “the book of the law” – likely the Book of Deuteronomy – in the Temple.
 - This discovery was followed by a time of “rededication.”
 - In 2 Kings 23:3 “The Book of the Law” was read in public ceremony in the Temple “and the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book: and all the people joined in the covenant.”
 - However, as the saying goes, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”
 - Consider the words of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 3:10:

“⁶The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: ‘Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? ⁷And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me,’ but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. ⁸She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. **Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. ⁹Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. ¹⁰Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.**”

- H.L. Ellison writes, “I do not doubt that the first impulse of Jeremiah’s heart was to leap with joy, when the news of a clean sweep of all heathenism was first received. But as a prophet, viewing it from God’s standpoint, he could see that it never had any chance of success. It was not that it stayed superficial; there never was any question of its being anything else.”
- As Jeremiah writes, in Jeremiah 30:37, it was the “time of Jacob’s trouble”; a very dark time in the life of the nation of Judah.

<p>So what is clear about the Old Covenant is that it was lacking with respect to the <u>ability</u> of the people. Thus, a New Covenant was necessary.</p>
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a. God will Implant the Law Within His People

- The concept of Scripture memorization is common throughout the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 6:6-9: “⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Psalm 119:11: “¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

- Yet, the memorization of the Law, although good, does not ensure that the individual will keep what he or she has memorized. The Pharisees were living proof of this truth. They knew the Law by heart; yet their hearts were far from God.”
- **What the people needed were new hearts and minds...A NEW NATURE.**
- And this is exactly what God promised in the New Covenant. In **Verse 10**, the Jeremiah is quoted:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
After those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws into their minds,
And write them on their hearts,
And I will be their God,
And they shall be my people.”

- This, once again, demonstrates the insufficiency of the Old Covenant.

Richard Phillips writes, “[The Old Covenant’s] main problem was not that it lacked grace, but that it was an external administration of salvation. That is, it did not convey to the people the inward power needed to fulfill its demands. It is in this respect that the new covenant is better, and is able to succeed where the old one failed. The new covenant works internally; it transforms those who come to God through it...In the old covenant, God gave the people his law, but that covenant did not give them the ability to receive it, love it, or keep its demands.”

- This summer I was hospitalized for two days because of a severe ear infection. Prior to my hospitalization, doctors had prescribed for me antibiotic ear drops in order to heal my infection. However, my ear canal had completely closed, and so the drops could not get to the source of the infection, and consequently, it only worsened. The problem was not the medication – it was exactly what I needed to kill the infection – the problem was that the medication alone could not cure my

problem. I needed something else to get the medication to the source of my illness. This is precisely why I went into the hospital – not for a new drug – but for a *delivery system* (Intravenous Antibiotics) that would take the cure to the source.

- This need for a new heart was also declared by the Prophet Ezekiel:
 - Ezekiel 36:25-26: “²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

This is nothing short of the promise of the *indwelling* of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

- Notice here, as well, that the author draws a distinction between the heart and the mind.

A.W. Pink comments, “The ‘heart’ as distinguished from the ‘mind’ comprises the affections and the will. First, the understanding is informed, and then the heart is reformed. An active principle of obedience is imparted, and this is nothing else than a *love* for God Himself. Where there is a real love for God, there is a genuine desire and determination to *please* Him. The heart of the natural man is ‘alienated’ from God and opposed to His authority. That is why, at Sinai, God wrote the commandments upon stones—not so much to secure the outward letter of them, as to represent the *hardness of the hearts* of the people unto whom they were given. But at regeneration God takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26)—pliable, living, responsive.”

□ Yet, the point is clear: **The Old Covenant was external, the New Covenant internal. The Old Covenant was written on stone at Sinai, the New Covenant is written on flesh – on the heart of the believer.** This is why the New Covenant believer is a Temple – because like the Holy of Holies which contained the Law in the Old Testament, the heart of the believer contains the Law in the New.

- This is why in **Philippians 2:13**, the Apostle Paul states, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
- Yet, this ***inward working*** demands a sovereign work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pink wrote, “The preacher may announce the law of God to the outward ear, but only the Spirit can engrave it on the mind.”
- In **2 Corinthians 3:6, 14**, the Apostle Paul writes, “⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life... ¹⁴But their minds were hardened. For to this day,

when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.”

- This promise of the inward working of God in the New Covenant is followed immediately by the most comforting of covenantal language:

“...and I will be their God,
And they shall be my people.”

b. God’s People will Know Him

- The next “better promise” involves **Knowing God**.
- **Verse 11** states:

“¹¹And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.”

- In other words, in the New Covenant **the people will not know about God by teaching one another; rather, they will know God PERSONALLY, being taught by Him directly.**
- This promise parallels the words of Jesus in John 6:44-45: ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets, '**And they will all be taught by God.**' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—

- This is a promise, a [paraphrased] quote from the Old Testament:

“All your sons will be taught of the LORD;
And the well-being of your sons will be great.” Isaiah 54:13

- Commenting on John 6, theologian D.A. Carson writes, “When he [the Father] compels belief, it is not by savage constraint...but by the wonderful wooing of a lover...Otherwise put, it is by an insight, a teaching, an illumination implanted within the individual, in fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, *They will all be taught of God.*”
- **This is the classic distinction between knowing *about* God indirectly through another source, and knowing God *directly* from Him**
- Andrew Murray writes, “Personal, direct fellowship with God: this is the crowning blessing of the new covenant.”

- Jesus Himself comments, in His High Priestly prayer of John 17, that this is the essence of eternal life: Knowing God. “³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3

c. God will Forget their Sins

- **The final “better promise” of the New Covenant is stated in Verse 12:**

“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more.”

- In his commentary on the Book of Hebrews, John Owen wrote, “This is the great fundamental promise and grace of the new covenant...The first thing that is necessary is the free pardon of sin.”
- **And the free pardon of sin occurs because God is merciful toward His people.**

Richard Phillips comments, “The word ‘merciful’ (Greek, *hileos*) is the root of the word that is used in the description of the mercy seat that sat atop the ark of the covenant. In Greek, it was called the *hilasterion*. This was the place where the blood of the sacrifice was brought by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The high priest came into the holy of holies, the inner sanctum, where the golden cherubim rested atop the ark of the covenant. This was God’s throne from which he looked down upon the Ten Commandments, which were kept in the ark. Before him came the high priest, representing all the sinful and wicked people. According to God’s law he must be struck down immediately, except that he brought before him the blood of the sacrifice, shed for the sins of the people. The blood was poured upon the mercy seat, so that God looked down and no longer saw the law that was transgressed, but the blood that paid the debt of sin. We might well read the promise of Verse 12, therefore, as saying, ‘I will be mercy-seated toward your iniquities.’”

- F.F. Bruce comments, “For the Hebrew, ‘remembering’ was more than a mental effort; it carried with it the thought of doing something to the advantage, or disadvantage, of the person remembered.”
 - In other words, if God *remembered* our sins, He would be compelled to act, in accordance with His divine justice, and punish us for those sins.
 - Consider **Revelation 16:9**: “¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.”
 - This truth is the essence of the great passage in Psalm 113:

Psalm 113:12: “¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

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- The author of Hebrews concludes this chapter by stating, in **Verse 13**, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”
- This is likely an anticipatory predication of the fall of the Temple, which occurred in A.D. 70. Yet, this author is not the first to mention this.
- **Jesus predicted the fall of the Temple in the Gospels:**

Mark 13:2: “²And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.’”

John 2:19: “¹⁹Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’”

- Yet, not only this, but so did **Stephen:**

Acts 6:14: “¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”

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- Yet, the point is clear: The New Covenant is superior to the Old, and there is no longer a need for the shadows of the Old Covenant, such as the Temple and the sacrificial system.
- And, just as God pictured Himself as the groom of Israel in the Old Testament, so in the New, the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Isaiah 62:5: “⁵For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.”

- The ultimate and final fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:31-34 will occur at the eschaton.

Revelation 21:1-4: “¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. **He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.** ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”