

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)  
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
Monday, August 03, 2020

## Hebrews 8:6-13      “The New Covenant”

Intro.<sup>1</sup> The key word of v.6 is “better” and in many ways that word is a key word for the whole book of Hebrews. In fact, out of 18 occurrences of the word in the New Testament, it is used 12 times in this one book of Hebrews! In the 1<sup>st</sup> four chapters he basically said that in Jesus we have a better person. Jesus Christ outranks the angels. Jesus is better than Moses, the great lawgiver. In Chapters 5-7 he says that in Jesus we have a better high priest. In Chapters 8-10, he shows us that in Jesus we also have a better sacrifice, as well as a better covenant.

The focus of today’s message is the fact that Jesus ratified a better Covenant. Your Bible you hold in your hands is divided into two big sections. You have an Old Testament and a New Testament. I guess you have noticed that! The word, testament, and the word, covenant, really mean the same thing. What is a covenant? The word, covenant literally means, “to cut.” It means to make a binding agreement between individuals ratified by sacrifice. In the Old Testament, one of the ways they signified an agreement is they would sacrifice animals and cut them in two. They would put one piece over here and one piece over there. Then the two people who had entered into this covenant or agreement would walk in between those two pieces of the cut animals.

The “better covenant” that is referred to in this paragraph was announced by the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) at a time when the nation’s future seemed quite bleak. God gave the promise of restoration and blessing based on a new covenant. I am preaching this message today because Jesus, when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, said, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Clearly, He knew that His sacrifice on the cross the next day would make it possible for the blessings of the New Covenant to be given to us.

This passage of Scripture will expand upon how the covenant mediated by Christ is better than the covenant of law, mediated by Moses and countless priests after him.

Now let’s consider first of all:

### I. THE INFERIORITY OF THE COVENANT OF LAW

Our author says in v.7, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.” The very fact that there was a new covenant between God and man in Jeremiah 31 indicates that the old agreement was flawed. The Old Covenant was not false, but it had a problem associated with it. It *required* righteousness, but it could not *produce* righteousness. When given the Old Covenant, Israel said, “All that the LORD has spoken will we do, and be obedient” (Ex. 24:7). But they did not have the moral power to match their good intention. So the problem is with *us*, not the law. In fact, after mentioning the problem with the covenant of law in v. 7, he says in v.8, “Because finding fault with them....” The problem was not really with the law of God, but with sinful man. The problem of the old is that it was contingent not only upon what God promised *He* would do, but upon what the people promised *they* would do. There is nothing wrong with God’s law. It had a good purpose. Galatians 3:10 says it was our schoolmaster to bring us to

---

<sup>1</sup> When I preached this in 2003, I began with, “On what basis do you rest your hope of heaven? A significant number of people would say, ‘I live by the 10 commandments.’” Then, I incorporated point I into the introduction.

Christ. It showed us that spiritually and morally, there is a whole lot wrong with us. Man is totally depraved. Then by convincing us of our sin, we should seek the salvation that the sacrifices of the Law pointed to, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Now if Israel could have obeyed the Law, the Old Covenant would have provided life, righteousness, and blessing. Instead, all it did was bring judgment.

Furthermore, as already noted, the Old Testament Scriptures themselves should have led Israel to expect a new covenant to replace the old. Jeremiah prophesied about the failure of Israel under the Old Covenant (7:23-26). When he wrote Jeremiah, the national life of Israel was in collapse. Their failure to obey the Law only brought judgment, not blessing. The words, “no place would have been sought for a second” imply a sense of dissatisfaction with the First Covenant while it was still in force. So Jeremiah prophesied of the need for a New Covenant. As a result our author puts the Jewish recipients of this letter in the place where they will have to accept the New Testament and the testimony of their own prophet. Yet millions of Jews even today are hanging on tenaciously to the Old Covenant, even though their own Scriptures, through their own beloved prophet, have been telling them for well over 2,500 years that a new one was to come!

By the way, there are many people today who are still basing their hope of heaven on the covenant of Law. If you ask them if they will go to heaven when they die, they may say, “Well, I hope so. I try to live by the 10 commandments.” Folks, if you’re hoping to go to heaven based on keeping the 10 commandments, you are going to be disappointed. You need to understand the inability of the Law to save you because of the weak, sinful nature of man. Fallen, sinful man can never be saved by keeping the Law, because we can’t live up to the standard required by a holy God.

However, in spite of our sin, there is hope for forgiveness and eternal life. This hope is based on:

## II. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW<sup>2</sup> COVENANT

Our author says in v.8, “Because 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.’” The Covenant of Law was perfect for the purpose for which it was planned, as an index-finger pointing out our sin and guilt but also pointing to Messiah and His substitutionary atonement. But it was faulty when it came to enablement for obedience, and providing true and lasting atonement for disobedience.

Have you ever cooked a roast to the point that it is very tender? Suppose that you have just cooked such a roast. You get a fork and put it down into the roast to lift it up, but it won’t hold. You may try again, but still it won’t hold. It’s so tender it just breaks apart. So you get a large, strong spatula. You put the spatula under the roast and lift it out. You see, what the fork could not do, because of the weakness of the roast, the spatula is able to do. Now, there is nothing wrong with the fork—it was a good fork. But it couldn’t hold the flesh because something was “wrong” with the flesh—it was too tender. The spatula does what the fork could not do. Even so, the Law is like the fork in that it was weak through the flesh.<sup>3</sup> We need a new covenant, a better way. The law can’t save you. In Romans 8:3 it says, “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through

---

<sup>2</sup> It is **new in kind** (*kainos*), not new in time (*neos*). This covenant is not just “improved” or “modified.” It is not slightly different, but radically different from the old one. God affected a new covenant, which was “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers” (v. 9a).

<sup>3</sup> Illustration from McGee.

the flesh, God did by sending His own Son....”

So let me tell you about the New Covenant that God promised. There are several reasons why the New Covenant is superior. First of all, it was:

A. One Sided and Initiated by God – In v.8 “I will make” (*sunteleo*) is “I will complete or accomplish.” A last will and testament is a type of covenant and illustrates beautifully God’s covenants with His people. This covenant is one-sided like a will. A will is written by one person, the maker of the will. A beneficiary has no part in determining the benefits. He can only accept or reject—he cannot change—what the will provides for him. Notice what it says in the New Covenant. Three times in v.10 God says, “I will.” Verse 12 says, “For I will be merciful...” and “I will remember no more.” If I counted correctly, in those 3 verses, God says, “I will” six times. God has given us an unconditional promise. It is totally dependent upon God, not us. So the New covenant in Christ, the Messiah, is based solely on God’s sovereign terms. It is God who takes the initiative in His grace, bestowing His promises freely on those whom He has called to be His people. That’s why back up in v.6 it says he’s the mediator of a better covenant that is established upon better promises. It’s all based upon the promises of God. You are not saved because you promise God what you are going to do. You are saved because God promised He would do everything for you. It is a covenant in the sense that it is an agreement on God’s part that He will give salvation to the sinner who will receive it by faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a testament in the sense that Jesus, the divine Testator, dies to make the will effective. So the Old Covenant was based on our performance while the New Covenant is based on what *God* will do for us.

Furthermore, the New Covenant is superior because it is:

B. More Inclusive – In v.8 we see that the New Covenant was made with both the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. At the time of the prophecy, the house of Israel had been destroyed as a separate identity. Yet, it included them. Then also v.11 says, “all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” That’s inclusive! It was offered to young and old, rich and poor, to kings as well as to paupers. But as it turned out, the covenant was even more inclusive than that! The New Testament makes it clear that the blessings of this covenant extend to the Gentiles that believe in the Messiah.

This brings up the question, “What is the relationship between this New Covenant promised to Israel, but today experienced by the church? Perhaps the solution is found in God’s principle of “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). God did promise a New Covenant for His people, and it was first offered to the Jewish people. But the nation rejected the message and the messengers. Now, the blessings of the New Covenant, purchased on the cross, are offered to all who believe in Christ. Nevertheless, God makes no covenants with the Gentiles. The blessings of the New Covenant have come to us through the Jewish Messiah, and through the Jewish apostles. As Paul says, we are like a wild branch that has been grafted into the vine of true Israel (Romans 11:17). Remember, the goal of the Abrahamic covenant was to bring blessing to *all* nations (Gen. 12:3; 28:14). God attached no conditions or demands to the covenant with Abraham. This covenant was simply a declaration of God’s intention to bless Abraham and his descendants, and the whole world through them. When Gentiles are saved, they become spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:7-8).

This covenant will someday be accepted by the Jewish people as a whole. When Jesus comes again to redeem Israel, then the blessings of the New Covenant will be applied to that beleaguered nation. The rejection by Israel did not do away with the covenant, since the new covenant is one-sided. For the time being, Gentiles are sharing more in the New Covenant than are

Jews. But Israel will someday accept the New Covenant and be restored (Rom. 11:17-24). My friend pastor Tony Crisp told me the other day that Jews in Israel are more open to the gospel now than ever.

Furthermore, another advantage of the New Covenant is that:

C. It Is Spiritual, Producing Internal Change – Our author says in v.10, “For 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....” The Old Testament law was on the outside, written on tablets of stone and in scrolls. It was law imposed from the outside. The Old Covenant had outward incentives such as fear of punishment or promises of blessing. But the New Covenant is based on inward changes.

It’s kind of like a thief. Using threats of punishment, the law can control a thief, but the law can’t change a thief. Prison alone has never been intended to rehabilitate people. But one night in that prison, some Christians go there and preach the gospel to him. He repents of his sin of thieving and whatever else. He invites the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart and life. What the law couldn’t do, the New Covenant of grace can do. In time he is released from prison and he doesn’t steal anymore, not because of the outside law, but because he has been changed on the inside.

Now that’s the general statement. Let’s now look into specifics. First of all:

1. God Changes the Heart - God’s new covenant also provides for inward regeneration. Jesus said you must be born again. That is a possibility with the New Covenant. Ezekiel gave similar prophecies, and through him God promised to give us a new heart (Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:26).<sup>4</sup> Sinful people need a new heart and a new disposition within. When a sinner trusts Christ, he receives a divine nature within (2 Peter 1:1-4).

The program committee for a national barbers’ convention devised a graphic means of demonstrating the effectiveness of their profession. At least, that is what they hoped. They found a social derelict on skid row with long, dirty hair. His face was unshaven and his clothes were ragged and filthy. His body reeked with odors of cheap liquor and filth. The barbers cleaned him up. They gave him a bath, shampoo, shave, haircut and a manicure. They liberally sprinkled talcum powder on him and added spicy cologne. He was dressed in a new suit and was presented before the convention as a changed man. He certainly looked the part. However, within a week the man was back on skid row, back in the gutter, back in his former pattern of living. The barbers altered his appearance, but their services had not changed his inward nature. Anyone can spend a bit of money and put a man in a new suit, but only Jesus can put a new man in that suit! 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” [Illus. by Norman Bales].

Another aspect of the inward change is:

2. He Gives an Inward Guide to Righteousness - The Holy Spirit is now able to do the impossible. The Holy Spirit can produce a holy life in weak and sinful flesh. V.10 says, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts.” This is much more than a human effort to memorize God’s law. This was already required in the Old Testament (Dt. 6:6-9). God writes God’s law in the minds and hearts of those who belong to Him. He is our teacher/leader. Rom. 8:4

---

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 11:19, "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 18:31, "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" Ezekiel 36:26, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

says, “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:3 says, “clearly you are 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.” Even though the New Covenant of grace brings with it freedom from the Law of Moses (Gal. 5:1), it does not bring freedom to disobey God and sin.

Finally, through this new covenant:

3. He Provides Power for Living – It’s one thing to know to do right, and another thing to have the power to do right. The Law of Moses could declare God’s holy standard, but it could never provide the power needed for obedience. But Php. 2:13 says, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” It is unfortunate that many Christians think they are saved by grace but must then fulfill their Christian life according to the Old Testament Law. They want the New Covenant for salvation but the Old Covenant for sanctification. No! It is by yielding to the Holy Spirit within that we fulfill the righteousness of the Law (Rom. 8:1-4); and this is wholly of grace.

The New Covenant of grace also provides a new motivation. We obey out of love and gratitude. God gives him a heart to *want* to do right. In the New Covenant true worship is internal, not external; real, not just a ritual. The new nature gives each believer both the desire and the dynamic for a godly life.

Finally, another advantage of the New Covenant is:

D. Forgiveness of Sin<sup>5</sup> - V.12 says, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” This is the capstone of the New Covenant. The word “for” connects that statement with the contents of the preceding verse. It speaks of the fact that the forgiveness of sins or the manifestation of God’s grace are prerequisite and fundamental to the person’s participation in the blessings of the New Covenant. So here is what men need more than anything else. This is the fundamental problem with the human condition. All efforts to deal with the problems of humanity, that fail to address sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the center untouched. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great blessings that the gospel brings for men. The Old Covenant *pictured* forgiveness, and God has always been revealed as a forgiving God. But only in the New Covenant is forgiveness provided into the very terms of the covenant in the most unqualified fashion.

1. The Promise of Forgiveness – He promises in the last of v.12, “their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” The words “I will remember no more” contain an emphatic negative in Greek (double negative). God will forget in the sense that He no longer holds our sins against us. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally. In fact, the word, forgive, literally means, “to let go” or “to send away.” It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, “I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea.” Though divine forgiveness does not annihilate all the temporal consequences of sin, it does eradicate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin, such as eternal separation from God, and the sense of discord and alienation between Him and us.

How can God treat us as if we have never sinned? The answer to that question is also implied in our text. Notice secondly,

2. The Basis of Forgiveness – When God says in v.12, “I will be merciful...”, the

---

<sup>5</sup> Maclaren says, “It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfillment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first.”

Greek word (*hileos*) is literally “propitious.” That means to provide satisfaction for Divine wrath against sin through sacrifice. Jesus said when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The shed blood of Jesus at Calvary fully satisfied what our sins deserve. The Law says “Do” but the new covenant says, “Done.” The Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon Christ’s death, as being the atonement for the world’s sin. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon of which my text speaks of is secured to men. I know not how we can find a firm footing for assurance of pardon apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. Without that, the divine forgiveness is but a hope, and even an illusion. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not. But at the cross, God treated His own Son Jesus as if He had sinner. When Jesus died on the cross, all of our sins were laid up on the Lord Jesus Christ. He was willing to change places with us. Now, we can be regarded as righteous, instead of sinners. When we can say, “Christ died for my sins,” then we can see that the divine righteousness and the divine love are brought together bringing forgiveness to the sinner.

### III. NOW, THE NEW COVENANT IS THE ONLY COVENANT

Our author says this quite clearly in v.13, “In 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.” In sharing the gospel with Jews—whether in New Testament times or today—one of the biggest stumbling blocks for them is the idea that the Old Covenant has passed away, and that it is no longer valid for them or for anyone else. People have a hard time of letting go of what they are accustomed to.

Yet, it is clear that the New Covenant is the only covenant that provides hope for a relationship with God, and for forgiveness of sin. This is confirmed for the following reasons:

A. Prophesied in Jeremiah - The distinctive Greek word for “old” here is not *archaios*, namely that which is old in point of time, but *palaios*, that which is old in point of use, worn-out, antiquated, obsolete. Computers and cell phones can become antiquated, obsolete in just a few years, though they are not old in time. How many people want new shoes or clothes because they are “outdated” in less than a year? Even in Jeremiah’s time, the insufficiency of the First Testament was recognized, and the need of a new one proclaimed. By His merely saying that a new covenant was coming, clearly the Old Covenant would be replaced and set aside.

When would the Old come to an end?

B. Destroying the Old Began at the Death of Christ - The old sacrificial system actually was over when the veil was split in two (Mt. 27:50-51). Just before He died Christ proclaimed, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Christ’s sacrifice was complete, and the New Covenant was ratified.

C. “Ready to Vanish Away” (v.13b) - I think when the book of Hebrews was written, the temple was still standing. But it was just a matter of time and that whole temple came crashing to the ground and the sacrifices and the activities of the priests ceased. In fact, that likely took place within 7 years of the writing of this book. Without the Temple, there was no altar, no Holy of Holies. There could therefore be no sacrifices and no ministering priesthood. And without a priesthood and its sacrifices, there could be no Old Covenant. And by the way, they haven’t started

back since. It is so clear to me that the Old Covenant has passed and the New Covenant has arrived with Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Have you accepted God's New Covenant by faith in Jesus Christ, who shed His blood to ratify the New Covenant? Have you accepted God's promises to forgive your sin and change your life from the inside? Do you see evidence of the promised blessings of the New Covenant in your life? If not, trust in Jesus who ratified the New Covenant by His shed blood!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary, The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 15, v.12 only (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on 8:1-13 dated 6/27/01); Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be" Series: *New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to [www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker](http://www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker), or go to [www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources](http://www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources). Dr. Felker's email address is [S+Felker&2@aol.com](mailto:S+Felker&2@aol.com) (remove signs).