



“The New & Better Covenant”

Part II
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I really don't think there is anything more important we could be doing right now than delving into the truths of God's word. I hope you'll plan to stay with me for this next half hour as we continue our study on *The New & Better Covenant*. You'll recall that a *covenant* simply means an *agreement*. We're accustomed to making agreements and signing contracts with various people, businesses, or entities today. God makes covenants as well. Throughout history, He has made several covenants with various people. He had a covenant with Noah. He famously made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Then, there was the covenant made with Moses and the Jewish nation or Israelites. God also made a covenant with David and his descendants that would reign over Israel. Finally, we have what is known as the *new covenant* which came through Jesus Christ. Not only does the Bible say that a new covenant came; it also teaches that it replaced that covenant which was old.

We'll introduce our lesson by rereading our text from last week.

Hebrews 8:1-6” Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. 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.”

Not only do we have a new covenant today, but the Hebrew writer says it is a better covenant. He compares the high priest of old and various ceremonies, gifts, and sacrifices that he offered in the tabernacle of old with OUR great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the true tabernacle, His people-- the Church-- and the temple (or house) of God today, which the old tabernacle foreshadowed. We're going to talk about why this new covenant is better. We'll follow the comparisons that the Hebrew writer makes in this second part of our study.

The key note of the book of Hebrews is the word *better*. The letter as a whole is a contrast between the former (old) covenant that God made with physical Israel and the new covenant that God has established with His spiritual Israel. That old covenant was made with the Jews and it was marked by the physical mark of circumcision, whereas this new covenant is made with all those who become obedient to the faith of Jesus Christ who are circumcised in heart. This new covenant is made with Jews and Gentiles alike, who together make up spiritual Israel.

In last week's study, we noted the contrasting differences between the old and new covenants. The idea of the old covenant passing away and being replaced with a new covenant is not something that God did on the fly or came up with on the spur of the moment. Rather, this was God's ultimate objective and plan all along. We noted that hundreds of years before, Jeremiah prophesied of the coming day when God would establish a new covenant with His people. Even in that prophesy, he shows us the difference between the old and the new. In our text, the Hebrew writer quotes Jeremiah's prophecy beginning in **verse 7**.

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

It wasn't that the law itself was bad or sinful or evil; it came from God. God gave the law to Moses to give to the people. God was the author of that covenant. The problem was with those with whom the covenant was made; they didn't keep it. God found fault with them. They reneged upon their obligations to God and to that covenant. What the old covenant did was show the need for a savior. Man couldn't save himself and would always fall short. He needed a perfect sacrifice for his sins. He needed the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the new covenant came by the promised Messiah—the Lord Jesus.

Hebrews 8:10-11 "For 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: And 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."

What he is saying is that the old covenant was made with a physical nation. One was part of that covenant by essence of being born into it, a Jew, who at eight days old had been circumcised. Under the new covenant, one becomes part of it by the new birth, as Jesus taught Nicodemus (**John 3**), which is not a physical birth, but a spiritual rebirth, through obedience to the gospel. When we, in faith, are baptized for the remission of our sins, our sins are washed away, we are circumcised in heart, and we become part of this new covenant that came by Jesus Christ.

So, a Jew of old was born into the covenant and later had to be taught about his lineage and heritage, and taught to *know the Lord*, but under the new covenant it is not that way. It's through faith, which comes by hearing, that one is led to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ and he enters into this new

covenant. The contrast was made all the way back in the book of **Jeremiah** and is now repeated by the Hebrew writer, showing that the old covenant was fleshly in nature, made with physical Israel, as opposed to the new covenant that God has now established with spiritual Israel, His church, which is made up of Jew and Gentile alike.

We also noted last week that another thing that makes the new covenant better is the fact that it came by a better mediator. The law of old came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. To continue, thirdly, another reason the new covenant is a better covenant is because it has a better high priest. A priest in the Old Testament was a minister who led the worship of God's people, represented the people before God, and performed rituals and sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. Ordinary priests were many back then, but today we have no such men between us and God. In fact, it is a terrible misnomer when people today refer to their preacher or some special man as their priest, because the New Testament plainly teaches that every believer is a priest for himself.

Revelation 1:5-6 "...Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

So, every Christian is a priest on his own behalf. But in the Old Testament, there was a special class of priests that could be traced back to the sons of Aaron. These men were called *high priests*, and they served a very special purpose in the atonement of the sins of the people. There was a special day called the Day of Atonement, and it happened every year on the tenth day of the seventh month. On this all-important day, the high priest would sacrifice an animal for himself, then he would enter the most hallowed and sacred place on earth, the holy of holies, or most holy place in the temple. There, on behalf of the people, he would ever so reverently and humbly take the blood of this sacrifice and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, which was considered God's dwelling place among them. That was an awesome and even frightening occasion for the high priest, to once a year enter the very room where God dwelt, and where no other man dared to tread, to perform this sacred, essential duty.

The Bible teaches us that when the high priest offered the blood upon the mercy seat, God would accept the offering and would roll the sins of the people forward for a year. Sins were actually forgiven under the Old Testament, but they were forgiven predicated upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which was to come. That simply means that in those sacrifices of old, God delayed the collection of the debt that sin had incurred; He would be temporarily appeased in view of the sacrifice that had been offered. The problem was that the atonement was for that year, and when that sacred day came around the next year, another sacrifice had to be made by the high priest on his behalf and on behalf of the people for all of the sins that had been committed.

You can see that the work of the high priest wasn't sufficient. It wasn't resulting in the complete and FULL forgiveness and remission of sins. Rather, it merely put off sin's full payment until Christ would come as the perfect, unblemished lamb of God and take away the sin of the world. We call that a system of limited atonement because it was limited in that it did not have the power to completely, fully, and finally remove sin. It could be compared to a creditor allowing a debtor to make interest payments on a debt until he can provide something sufficient to pay the debt off.

You see, the only thing that could pay our sin debt was the blood of Christ. Not the blood of an animal. The Bible teaches very plainly in the Hebrew letter that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away

sin, but that Christ is our great High Priest, who offered His own blood before God and that blood was able to the uttermost to forgive our sins. He is a better High Priest because not only was He sinless Himself, and therefore needed no sin sacrifice, but also because He was able to do ONE TIME what the high priest of the Old Testament had to do every year.

Hebrews 9:6-12 “Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. (That’s talking about all the rituals and sacrifices of the old tabernacle and temple.) **But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”**

Isn’t that grand? It’s reasonable to suppose that sometime after His resurrection from the tomb, Jesus went into the presence of His heavenly Father, the true Holy of holies, bringing His own blood, just as those high priests had done in the physical tabernacle on earth, as an atonement for our sins. Those high priests of old went every year, but the Bible says He went one time and accomplished the full and final forgiveness for our transgressions.

Hebrews 10:1 “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.”

He paid the debt in full so that we don’t owe our own lives in payment for sin. The new covenant truly promises a better High Priest. The blood of bulls and goats was a temporary and limited system but was completely worthless if not predicated upon the sacrifice of Jesus that was to come. The blood of bulls and goats was ineffectual and unable to do anything except delay the judgment of God. What millions of gallons of animal blood that was shed upon the Jewish altars could not do, one drop of the precious blood of Jesus Christ accomplished.

Hebrews 9:13-14 “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Paul warned the brethren not to leave the church and repudiate the gospel by going back to the law of Moses. He said that such would have eternally damning consequences. For one reason, that old system did not provide the sacrifice that was ultimately needed to pay the price that sin exacted.

Hebrews 10:26-27 “For if we sin wilfully (meaning to go back to that old law and sacrificial system) after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more

sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Within that old law itself, there was no sacrifice that could once and for all pay the debt fully to take away the sin of man. Christ died to free us from that law and its certain condemnation. We make the death of Jesus a vain and unnecessary thing when we forsake Christ and go back to the law as means of vindication with God. You may be thinking, *are men really doing that today?* In some ways, yes. They uphold many of their practices and teachings not by what the New Testament says, but by what the Old Testament said to the Jews so long ago. I hope you can see that we have a better covenant offered to us today. It is built upon better principles and promises than the one that came through Moses.

Lastly, the old covenant was merely a shadow of the new. Therefore, all the sacrifices, ceremonies, and precepts of that Old Testament system, tabernacle, and priesthood foreshadowed the reality that we now have in Jesus Christ. It is futile and foolish to go back to the Old Testament and seek to duplicate, enact, and carry out the rituals, commandments, and ceremonies of the Old Testament law. Those things have been done away in Christ Jesus, because that which those things prefigured has now come into reality. Paul said in reference to the old law and its ceremonies:

Colossians 2:17 “Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Speaking of the priests of Israel who offered sacrifices back in that old dispensation, Paul said this:

Hebrews 8:5 “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things...”

So, the things practiced and taught in the Old Testament were shadows of the things we now enjoy in this day and age. A shadow is not the real thing; it’s really only a crude picture of something else. When the sun shines on a tree, it casts a shadow upon the ground. The shadow is not the tree; it’s only a representation or picture of it. When you look at the shadow, you can see some of the tree’s characteristics, but you aren’t looking at the actual tree and thus you can’t see every detail. You are merely looking at the shadow. That’s the way it is with the things of the law: they are shadows or pictures of the ultimate blessings that one day would be found in Christ Jesus.

For example, the Sabbath Day that the Jews were commanded to keep holy under the law. That was a shadow. Paul mentioned this in particular when he wrote to the Colossians regarding the *handwriting of ordinances* that was *taken out of the way and nailed to the cross*. He wrote that they were to *let no man judge* them on those old ordinances, and one of the things he mentioned was Sabbath Days (**Colossians 2:14-16**). The Sabbath Day merely prefigured the rest that we now have in Christ Jesus. It was a shadow. The tabernacle with all of its furnishings and services was merely a shadow. Those various ceremonies represented Christ and the salvation we have in Him in the church today. We don’t go back and pattern our worship after the temple worship of the Old Testament. That’s what people do who try to defend instrumental music in Christian worship. There was no instrumental music in the first century church. Not only does history bear that out, but the Bible is silent about the New Testament church using mechanical instruments of music to render praise to God. That happened in the temple under the Old Testament system of worship. If people want to find a passage of scripture to justify playing an instrument in worship, they have to go back to the Old Testament. Our pattern for worship and living today is within the New Testament; not within the shadow. It is in the reality.

We live under a NEW covenant, a BETTER covenant. Why would we want to go back to the slavery, the fear, the condemnation under which men lived under the old law when Christ has made us free from that? When today we can serve the Lord in a covenant with better promises, with a full and final sacrifice for sin? A covenant where the forgiveness of sin is promised and realized? Thank God we live under the new and better covenant today!

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