

The CITYGATES C H U R C H

Hebrews 8:1-13 A New And Better Covenant

Summary: God established a new covenant with His people writing His law on their hearts and minds, demonstrating mercy, and remembering their lawless deeds no more.

We've been working our way through the book of Hebrews where the message is: Jesus is better. We've seen that He is better than the priests of the old Jewish religious system, and now we'll see He's better than the old religious covenant that established that system. In the coming weeks we'll see that He's better than the tabernacle and Temple at the center of that system and finally how He's better than all the sacrifices of that system as well.

We need to jump right in this morning because we've got some really, really, good stuff to cover.

Hebrews 8:1 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

Right away, Christian, you've got to notice: this isn't telling us *what we need*, it's telling us *what we have*. We *have such a High Priest*. These things are done, finished, fixed, we simply need to understand how much we've received in Jesus.

And speaking of Him, notice His present posture – He is in heaven, at the throne of God, and *He is seated*. He's not pacing the floor wondering how things are going to work out down here. He's not doomscrolling on His phone, or endlessly refreshing His feed for updates on what people are doing now. He has no concern. He is seated because the work is finished, the outcome is sure.

And that's really interesting because we learn that Jesus, our great High Priest, serves in the sanctuary of God in heaven, which the sanctuary on earth was modeled after.



God gave Moses the vision for what the center of Jewish worship was to look like, from the beautifully embroidered curtains, to the various pieces of furniture including an altar, a massive lampstand, a table for showbread, but no chairs. There was no place for the priests to sit in the tabernacle because their work was never finished – there was always more to do.

Yet now, Jesus, our High Priest, *is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens* because, as He said on the cross, “it is finished.” Jesus, our High Priest, is better than every priest, prophet, or pastor that has ever walked the earth because instead of offering endless sacrifices, He offered only one – Himself.

3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is necessary* that this One also have something to offer. 4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*” 6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

There were many priests serving in the Temple at the time when Jesus lived, and they offered many sacrifices, the problem was not a shortage of manpower or supplies, it's not that the spiritual economy wasn't pumping. There was plenty of movement, but very little progress. It turns out the system wasn't working, it wasn't producing righteous people; in fact, it was the senior priests who most opposed Jesus and worked with the Romans to secure His execution.

We'll talk more about this next week, but the sobering truth is, all their robes, all their political connections, and even this massive, beautiful, architectural triumph of a Temple in the center of the capital city was not producing holy men and women who reflected the heart of God. It was a plastic model of the real thing, the difference between a plastic knife and chef's knife, and after generations of trying to make it work, it was becoming increasingly obvious, we needed the real thing and so Jesus became the [Mediator of a better covenant](#).

7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 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— 9 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 did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*”

The first covenant is the covenant God made with Moses and the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. It contained good promises, but it suffered from a fatal flaw, because it was a two-sided covenant, an if-then, covenant. It depended on the people of Israel doing certain things, meeting certain conditions, and if they did that, then God would bless them. It was mathematical, this plus this, equals that.

The law was a diagnostic tool to tell you what was right and what was wrong, what you could and could not do. That's not bad. In fact, it's really very good. It's good to be told and know what is right and wrong. Many of the problems we have in America today are driven by the fact that we tell everyone they get to decide what is right and wrong, they get to decide who they want to be and who they want to sleep with. The problem is there are things that you might feel like doing in the moment that you will regret later in life.

Most of would say, we've made some stupid choices at times, when we didn't listen to anyone else, or wouldn't ask for advice, or wouldn't listen when it was given, we just did what we wanted to do, and later on, we regretted it, we wish we could go back and change it. So, being told how to live and what to do, being given a set of expectations, directives, and guidelines is actually a gift, a wonderful gift of boundaries within which to thrive.

The problem is, what do you do when, even with clear guidelines, expectations, and instructions, you still fail? What do you do when your own heart wants to climb over the walls that were meant to protect you? That's the problem with the law, with the old system of religious rules - it just told you what good, strong, people do, but it couldn't forgive you or help you when you were weak.

So, the problem is not the law, it's with your inability to keep it. And yet, some people, especially many of you in this room, are the kind of people who thrive on a challenge. If someone tells you this is hard, you say, "sign me up!" God bless you, but you think you're up for whatever challenge comes your way. And that attitude has gotten you through quite a bit, you have a long list of accomplishments to show for the grit and tenacity you've developed over time.

But you're still no match for the demands of the law – you see, this system wasn't meant to weed out the weak, it wasn't meant to screen out the strong and determined, it was meant to show us that no one could measure up. Do you realize that if someone could, if this could be done, then there would be no need for Jesus to come? The path would be proven and it would be up to you to conquer the quest.

But, as we said last week, one of the things you find over and over in Scripture is that God shows us other ways of doing things so we can see, that didn't work out. If all you needed was a code to live by, a list of rights and wrongs and a good set of instructions, then there would be no need for Jesus to come and rescue us. God gave us several centuries to try it out and see what would happen. He told us exactly what He expected, and people failed.

At that point, He would have been completely justified in walking away, in saying, "You know what, ya'll aren't really into this, or up to this, I'm out." But He didn't. He stepped in and said, "OK, we tried that, now watch, I'm going to do it for you." So Jesus came and fulfilled all of the law's requirements, did exactly what the law demanded under the terms of the old covenant and then set up new rules in its place as God had said He would.

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; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 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.

The author of Hebrews points back to the prophet Jeremiah who had written nearly six hundred years before Jesus. God used him to tell the people living under the law of Moses, under the old covenant, that a new and better covenant was coming. Jesus brought that new covenant, and now the old, notice, was ready to vanish away.

That old system required sacrifices for the things you had done wrong, and sacrifices needed to be made at the Temple, but the Temple was going to be destroyed in just a few years when the Roman army invaded to put down a Jewish rebellion in 70 AD. *It has never been rebuilt.* Today when you see people praying in Jerusalem at the Western, or Wailing Wall, they're praying at what was once the foundation of that great temple that represented a system God said was [becoming obsolete and growing old \[and was\] ready to vanish away.](#)



But it was being replaced by something even better. I underlined three things in my Bible from verse six, notice, Jesus has {6} ... [obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.](#)

Sometimes you wonder if a new software update is going to be any good or if they're just going to wreck the old features you loved. Well, it's pretty obvious here, God's intent was to significantly upgrade what He's offering through Jesus who is better.

In fact, I want to show you three ways the new covenant is better than the old.

1. It is better because it no longer depends on us. If you go back and read the old covenant, the agreement God made with the people of Israel after leading them out of Egypt, you see that the key words were *if you*, meaning Israel – there were things the people had to do (Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 28-29). But in the new covenant, the key words are *I will* meaning, God says, I've got this.

In this short passage from Jeremiah quoted here in Hebrews, I found six times that God says "[I will.](#)"

[I will](#) make the covenant.

Now, it says He will make the covenant with Israel, but Scripture also tells us that anyone who is not of Jewish descent can be grafted in, adopted in, to what God is doing. And during the Last Supper Jesus said this is the new covenant I establish in My blood. So, the covenant is not just for those who are ethnically Jewish, it is for them, God's great desire is to save them, but they're the first domino that falls as the gospel reaches out to all the rest of us as well.

So regardless of your ethnicity or the language your grandparents spoke, look at the other things God promises He will do for anyone included in this new covenant.

He says, **I will** put My laws in their mind and hearts. **I will** be their God and they will be My people. **I will** be merciful to their unrighteousness. **I will** remember their lawless deeds no more.

In other words, this new covenant is anchored in what you believe about God and receive from God, not what you have earned and deserved.

2. The second thing that is better about this new covenant is **God promises to put His laws in our minds and in our hearts**. The old covenant was anchored in the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses. They were written on tablets of stone, etched into rock to show their unchanging nature. They were external to you.

The new covenant is all about a shift from the external to the internal. So, under the old covenant, a set of rules that was outside of you told you what was right and wrong. And if you broke those rules, you made a sacrifice or an offering that was outside of you as well.

But now, under the new covenant, everything moves into your heart and mind and soul. Under the new covenant, God is sanctifying, that is, changing our wants and desires. Scripture says we are “**being transformed ... from glory to glory... by the Spirit of the Lord**” (2 Cor 3:18).

Many of you have this testimony – you want things now that you didn’t want before you were following Jesus. And even now, your priorities, your desires, your values, are different than the people around you. Sometimes it even causes conflict, because they don’t understand why you don’t want to do the things they want to do.

Of course, it’s not always that way. There are times when you struggle, because part of you wants to do this thing, wants to follow the crowd, wants to cross that line or boundary, but you know you shouldn’t – you feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit telling you no, and you have to struggle, you have to resist. It’s like a wrestling match in your heart, mind, and soul for what direction you will go and what choices you will make.

Personally, I don’t like it. I wish it would go away. I wish I could just cast my vote once for King Jesus and be done. But in my personal experience it doesn’t always go that way. God writes His law in my mind and on my heart, I know what He desires, and I desire it too, but I’m still tempted at times to do something else, to follow another path, to go along with the crowd.

But listen, if you experience this struggle, it doesn’t mean you’re wrong, or you’re doing things wrong, *it means you’re spiritually alive*. The very fact that you feel conflicted means God is reaching out to you, guiding you, directing you, communicating with you, *it means you are spiritually alive*.

It means, either that God is pursuing you, convicting you of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come, or that you’ve already surrendered, been born again, and now He is

planting new desires in your heart and mind that conflict at times with the dying desires that still linger in your flesh and are aroused by the things of this world.

Either way, the correct response is to turn to God for help. Ask Him to help you resist sin and temptation and to give you a stronger desire for Him than you experience for anything else. Ask Him to magnify your affections for what is right and good, to help you overcome darkness by turning toward His bright, shining, glory.

Let me illustrate this for you by thinking about the world of addiction for a minute. Those who study this stuff and are experienced in dealing with addiction, take Alcoholics Anonymous for example, they will tell you there are two components to addiction. There is the physical component, there is what happens to your body when you drink or when you try to stop drinking. But then, there is a spiritual component as well. There's the problem you're trying to solve or escape by drinking so much or so often.

And you could say the same thing about narcotics or sexual addictions or gambling or even shopping. There is a physical component to what is happening, there are things occurring chemically in your body as a response to the activity. And it is possible for you to overcome all of that by sheer determination. You can white knuckle your way through a day or a week without giving into whatever it is that has taken over your life.

But chances are really good that you have only dealt with the physical side of the addiction. You've modified behavior, but not desire. Spiritually, internally, you're still a mess. You're filled with cravings and thoughts and desires. You're not giving in physically, but that doesn't mean you're free. At times you can hardly think straight.

And again, people in Alcoholics Anonymous and other places will tell you, if you don't solve the spiritual problem, if you don't tackle the reason *why you want that thing in the first place*, you'll either relapse back into it, or you'll find something else to take its place.

This is why we need God to change us. We don't just need Him to forgive us for our sins, we need Him to actually save us from our desires. To change the things we want and value and change the way we cope and respond. And this is what He does as [He writes His law on our hearts and our minds](#).

Through the power of the gospel, we are not only being saved and forgiven, we're being renewed on the inside of our lives. So we read:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Let God, ask God, to transform your mind, and then come to Him, spend time in prayer, in reading Scripture and let Him go after your heart as well ...

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [in your mind, in your heart] in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

You have an opportunity to do that Wednesday night when we gather for prayer and worship. You can do it as you work through the new Turn Aside study and saturate your heart and mind with Romans 8, you can do it as you take the new core class on Spiritual Disciplines – we’re working hard to create opportunities for you to change and grow here at City Gates, *because we all need to.*

We want this church to be a great place to be weird, to be messed up. It’s OK for you to not be OK here at church. You might feel like you have to keep it all together out there, when you go to work, or when you go shopping, on the sidelines at the kids’ games, or even among your own family, but in here, there are only two kinds of people – those who are a mess and need help, and those are still a mess but have also learned how to find some help in Jesus and want to help others find it too.

We’re all relying on God’s promise, that He will do this great work, and we want to surrender to Him and help each other. We’re all trusting in the mercy of God to make us something new through the new covenant.

3. Because, **the third great thing about this new covenant is** God says, *12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”*

Under the old covenant you were judged by how well you kept the rules: this is what the rules say, how are you keeping up? Early on, that can be an exciting challenge for some people, but sooner or later everyone taps out, no one crosses the finish line, no one makes the cut and some people start to wonder why they’re even playing the game.

If you’re not careful, you can treat church this way. You think it’s all about what you do and don’t do, the religious rules you keep. And so, some of you grew up with lists, things you did and didn’t do because you were Christians – what radio stations you did and didn’t listen to. What movies you could and could not see. What clothes you could and could not wear. What you could and could not drink. And your view of the faith was shaped more by what was on which list than it was by a personal relationship with God. Oh, God was mentioned, He was part of it, maybe it was even all done in His name, but the focus was more on keeping, or finding a way around, the rules, than it was on developing a relationship with God.

Church, God is not looking for really great rule followers. He tried it; it didn’t work. What He wants more anything else, and what we often resist more than anything else, is relationship. He wants to be at the center of our lives. He wants to write new desires in our hearts and minds, to guide us by His Spirit and give us spiritual gifts to use as we face the challenges of each day.

The root of all sin is turning away from God. And you can do that in rebellion by choosing something else instead of Him, or you can do you that by simply trying and trying to do good things in your strength without inviting Him in. Whichever one is you, He's saying, "Here I am. I know you need help. I know you've sinned. I know you've been unrighteous and lawless. I'm merciful and I'm here to help."

"If you come to Me, I will forgive you, and remember your wrongs no more."

Think about a toddler learning to walk. When your child or grandchild takes their first steps, you pull out the camera, make sure you catch the moment and post it or send it to everyone. Mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, even brothers and sisters are cheering, because this little child took their first steps.

That's the same way God looks at you. You're learning to walk, by grace. You're learning this new life in Him. *You're going to fall at times*, just like a toddler. But no one looks down on a child who's just learning to walk, for stumbling.

No one says, "You didn't make it very far, did you?" No. Your proud parents show you off to anyone who will watch and keep encouraging you to do it again and again, keep trying. "Come to Daddy."

Well, Christian, the encouragement for you this morning is: keep going. Keep trying. "Come to Daddy." Even if you stumble, even if you fall. He is merciful and He **will not remember your sins or your unrighteousness**, He won't rub your failures in your face, He'll pick you up in His arms, tell you He loves you, calm you down and encourage you to try again. He's writing His law on your mind and your heart, He's taking care of everything, initiating this covenant built on "I will" instead of "if you" and He's helping us see, that Jesus is better.

Let's pray.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. - Rom 15:13



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Hebrews 8:1-13 A New And Better Covenant

Summary: God established a new covenant with His people writing His law on their hearts and minds, demonstrating mercy, and remembering their lawless deeds no more.

- Why is Jesus a better High Priest for you? How do His past work, present location, and present position (seated) have an effect on your life and the way you view it?
- Remember, it was the priests of the old covenant, who served in the Temple, that fiercely opposed and eventually arrested Jesus. How could such 'religious' people get things so wrong? Where have you seen religion become a substitute for relationship with God?
- What was good about the old covenant? What is good about having lists and rules? Why do we like them at times?
- Are you the kind of person who likes challenges? Have you ever treated some aspect of religion as challenge? What was it and how did that work out? Is there anything helpful about this approach? Any down sides?
- What do you learn from God allowing us to try out the old covenant way of doing things? What was good, what was bad? Why do we need a new covenant instead?
- How have you experienced God writing His commands on your heart and mind?
 - How do you cultivate this awareness?
 - What has God already changed in your affections, thinking, and values?
 - What is He changing right now?
- Have you ever tried to white knuckle your way through change? What was that like? Has there ever been something that God changed in you seemingly effortlessly? Has there ever been anything that God changed in you but it felt like a bare-knuckled brawl with the desires of your flesh as you sought to surrender to God instead?
- Who do you see making baby steps of change that you can cheer for? When have you felt God cheering your development as a spiritual toddler?
- For more information on covenants God has made in Scripture examine Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 24:3-8; 2 Samuel 7:1-16 and Luke 22:14-20.