

RELATIONSHIP

Hebrews—Chapter 8

Study 9

The Heavenly Sanctuary

Hebrews 8 opens with a quick summary of chapter 7 focusing on Jesus Christ as our High Priest in heaven. Paul is about to transition from the topic of Jesus as High Priest to the topic of the new covenant. He begins this transition with a comparison of the heavenly priesthood and its earthly types.

“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, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 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’” (Hebrews 8:1-5).

This comparison between the earthly and heavenly priestly service naturally flows into a comparison between the old and new covenants. The two covenants, and specifically the new covenant, is the central focus of Hebrews 8.

A Better Covenant

“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. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 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’” (Hebrews 8:6-8).

The last verse points out why the first covenant was replaced by the second. God, it says, found “fault with them.” The question we need to ask is “What or who is ‘them?’” Could this refer to the Ten Commandment law? Did God find fault with His commandments? Some have thought so, but this idea presents some problems that will become apparent as we continue. Another option is that God found fault with the people. God either found fault with His Ten Commandments or with the people who said they would obey them. God asked the people to keep His commandments and the people said, “All that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient” (Exodus 19:3-8; Exodus 33). The fact is, God’s people repeatedly rebelled and were disobedient.

Many Christians teach that the old covenant was faulty because it contained the law. They believe that in the Old Testament God’s people had to obey the law in order to have salvation. And then when Jesus came, God made the new covenant that saves us by grace, and not by the law. Many have concluded that we are now under grace in the new covenant and, therefore, we no longer have to obey God’s law.

There are a couple of problems with this reasoning. The first problem is the idea that the Ten Commandments have ever been the means of salvation. Whether in the Old or New Testament dispensation, the clear declaration of the Bible is that salvation comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers in the Old Testament were saved by the gospel through faith and not by the works of the law (Hebrews 4:1-3; 11:1-40). Paul even warned New Testament believers who were falling into old covenant legalism that Abraham was saved through faith in the gospel (Galatians 3).

NOTES

“God having provided something better for us.” —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

The second problem is the idea that the law is old covenant. The law is in fact included in the new covenant (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16). In other words, if the law was the problem in the old covenant, what's it doing in the new covenant? Clearly, it's not the law that's the problem. It's the people. The "them" that God is finding fault with in Hebrews 8:8 is the people. This next verse makes it clear:

"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" (Hebrews 8:9).

Faulty People

It's faulty people not a faulty law. God has always had to work with faulty people. This is part of the sin problem. And one of the biggest faults we have is making promises to God that we cannot possibly keep. God found fault with the people whom He led by the hand out of Egypt because they made promises to Him that they did not keep. The fault was not that they broke the law, we all do that. The fault was that they made *promises* to keep God's law. They did not continue in God's covenant. What was the big problem with them? Simply that they made promises they couldn't keep. They made promises to do something they were powerless to do, namely, to obey God. This was, and is, the problem with the old covenant. And we still have an old covenant problem today. The truth is that we are not promise keepers. They weren't and we aren't—but, good news, God is!

What we call the old covenant is not about time or dispensation as much as it is about experience. It's about relying upon our promises to God, about walking in a semblance of Christianity. This is old covenant experience. God was forced into finding fault with them just as He must with us if we insist on entering into an arrangement with Him that we can't keep. Forty days from giving their word to God, the Hebrew nation, including Aaron, was in full-blown apostasy—can you relate? And yet they maintained a form of worshiping God. "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord," Aaron said as he fashioned a molten calf in honor of the gods of Egypt (Exodus 32:5). Then they decided to worship God by dancing around a pagan idol! Is it possible that our worship of God today is more pagan than biblical? Compare the following verses in relation to sun worship and the Bible Sabbath—Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Revelation 14:6-7; Ezekiel 8:16.

We may be living in a different dispensation. Yet, we are just as susceptible to idol worship by following pagan religion in the place of biblical truth. Paul says everything, and especially what happened on this occasion in the wilderness, was written as a warning to us in the end of time (1 Corinthians 10:1-14). They really thought they could make promises to God and keep those promises. Then they were even more convinced that they were worshiping God by dancing around a molten image. After all, Aaron, the high priest and brother of Moses, was with them. Our only hope of escape from the dead-end road of false promises and idol worship is the new covenant experience.

The New Covenant

"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. 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. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 8:10-12).

In these three texts we discover the bedrock of a new covenant experience. And one of the first things you notice is that the law is part of it. Here's a simple outline:

1. God's "law"—placed in our "minds and hearts."
2. God's forgiveness—"sins and iniquities remembered no more."
3. God's promises—God "will put" His "laws" into our hearts and God "will be merciful."

4. Relationship with God—"I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people," and "all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest."
5. Holy Spirit anointing—"they shall not teach every man his neighbor and every man his brother."

The new covenant is all about having God's law of love in our hearts and our sins being forgiven by the power of His promise through a relationship with God's anointing Spirit. The framework for the new covenant is law, gospel, power, relationship and anointing.

God Connection

The new covenant experience takes us from man reliant to God reliant. Every believer is to have a personal relationship with God and an individual experience in His Word. Preachers and teachers are no substitute for a direct, individual God connection. Abiding in Christ will keep us from being deceived by the anti-christ (anti-christ means "in the place of" or "against" Christ). The anti-christ wants us to put man in the place of Christ—to be man dependent instead of God dependent (1 John 2:20-28). Church attendance should be about God, not man. This is why Paul lovingly rebuked the believers in Corinth when they began to focus on men rather than Christ. Even Apollos and Paul, men of God and chosen leaders, were not to replace the believer's complete dependence on Christ. Paul warned us that focusing on the human rather than the divine is a clear indication that we are "carnal" Christians (1 Corinthians 3:4).

"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" (Hebrews 8:13).

The old is ready to vanish if you're ready for the new. Are you?

Summary

In Hebrews 8, Paul directs us to the new sanctuary, the new priesthood and the new covenant. This chapter is all about the new experience, a new way of walking with God. It is based on the perfectly reliable promise of God to us rather than our faulty promises to Him. In the new covenant, God is the Promise Keeper. He is the source of spiritual power. He promises to write His law in our hearts and minds and to forgive our sins and iniquities. In a very personal and individual way, He becomes our God and we become His people. Each person walking in the new covenant experience will have a personal and unique experience with God. They will be anointed by His Spirit, filled with His law of love and cleansed from sin by the merits of Christ. The old experience vanishes, making way for the new. So the question to be answered is—are you ready for the new?