

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part thirty

Sunday, October 8th, 2017 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1998

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THE NEW COVENANT AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF ALMIGHTY GOD

Hebrews 8:6-13 - "But 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. [8] For 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, [9] 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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. [10] 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. [11] And 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. [12] For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." [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."

When Christians say they "*know*" Jesus, what do they *mean*? There could hardly be a more important question than that. When church people talk about their "*personal relationship*" with Jesus, what *kind* of relationship do they have? And *how* did this relationship come about?

That last question is particularly important for the life of the church. To speak to some professing Christians you might get the impression *they* set the terms of their "*personal relationship*" themselves. Don't question or judge. They've prayed a certain prayer and that's that. They're now Christians. And it would be easy to assume Jesus had no say in the matter. He just "*accepts*" those who say they "*know*" Him.

And, of course, we're happy when people say they love and know Jesus. We *want* people to know Jesus. Sometimes the church is *so* happy they claim to know Jesus she doesn't want to raise any questions about the matter. We don't want to *judge* anybody, after all.

Then we come to texts like this one. They're less analyzed because they tell the less popular story about how one comes to "*know Jesus*," because they do it from *Jesus's side of the story*. The terms are fixed and non-negotiable. They shift the emphasis in conversion from *how I feel about my connection to Jesus* and replace it with *how Jesus understands His connection to me*.

And the emphasis isn't just on my *personal relationship* with Jesus. To use Jesus' own terminology, it's a matter of my *acceptance of the terms of the new covenant with Him*. That's why, as He came to the end of His earthly life, He described the atoning shedding of His blood as, "*...the new covenant in my blood*" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Covenant means an *agreement*. *Emotions* are affected and renewed, to be sure. There is a deeply rooted joy that has an eternal glory bound up in it that nothing else on earth can duplicate. But my *emotions* don't *produce* conversion for one second. It's the nature of the *terms of the covenant* that eternally change my status before Father God. And that's what today's text is all about.

1) JESUS REMAINS AN EMPTY RELIGIOUS MYTH UNTIL HE'S KNOWN AS BOTH MEDIATOR AND MINISTER OF A NEW SAVING COVENANT

Hebrews 8:6 - "But 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."

There are *two defining phrases* in this important verse. Both relate to how people "*know*" Jesus. Our writer says Jesus, the Christ, has "*obtained a ministry*," and that ministry is a ministry of *mediation* - "*...the covenant he mediates...*"

This matters because to try to "*love Jesus personally*" without basing that love on a knowledge of His *ministry of mediation* is like trying to "*love Santa*". There is no adequate *foundation* for feeding and growing in that love. This becomes an *imagined* personal relationship. And you'll be forced to re-pump your love for Jesus with every Sunday worship time.

Please understand. Those worship times are very precious and important. Vitaly important. But they should be a passionate *expression* of love that already exists in *an understanding of a loving covenant* - not a time of trying to *convince yourself you really love Jesus*.

Let me say it again as clearly as I know how. You can't *know* Jesus until you *know* Him on *His* terms rather than *yours*. And His terms are clear. He has obtained and exercises a *ministry* on your behalf. And that ministry is one of *mediator*.

We'll consider that detail in the next point. But here's why this is so important. We need to understand the gospel we're exporting to the world. There are all sorts of people who *admire* Jesus. There are people who think the world would be a better place if we all just tried to *live like Jesus*. "*What Would Jesus Do?*" bracelets abound. There are religions aplenty which consider Jesus one of the greatest prophets who ever lived. Teachers abound who admire the Sermon on the Mount. And there are countless church-goers who love having a "*friend in Jesus*" to come and apply a convenient rinse to their wrong-doings so they can continue in their self-directed life-styles without feeling guilty about it.

None of these people *know* Jesus - not on *Jesus' terms*. The *personal relationship* they think they feel is a relationship with *their own* Jesus in their religious imaginations only.

There is a much more *durable, satisfying* way to know Jesus:

2) WHAT THE NEW COVENANT IMPLIES AND HOW JESUS MEDIATES IT

Hebrews 8:6-9 - "*But 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. [8] For 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, [9] **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. **For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.**'"*

The logic of these verses isn't as complicated as it might appear at first reading. *Verses 6-7* reveal Jesus "*obtained a ministry*" of a newer, "*better*" (6) covenant. He *obtained* this ministry through His sinless life, sacrificial death, triumphant resurrection, and ascension to the throne of grace at the right hand of Father God.

Next, quoting the prophetic words of *Jeremiah*, our writer tells us *why this better covenant was needed*. In *verses 7-9* he retraces the betrayal of the first covenant given by *Moses* after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. The Israelites didn't *keep covenant with God*. They grumbled even while being delivered. They disobeyed the command to go into the promised land. They worshiped a golden calf right while Moses was receiving the commandment from God on the mountain. They married pagan wives and worshiped their idols. They didn't keep the Sabbath.

The list of covenant-breaking choices feels endless. The bottom line of all this rebellion is recorded in those painful, fearful words at the end of *verse 9* - "*...For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.*"

There you have it. There were *two parties* in this covenant. God kept His part of the covenant agreement. Israel didn't. And, according to the binding covenant terms, that could end in no other way than God's anger and wrath. Those final words are hard to read - "*...so I showed no concern for them, declared the Lord*" (9).

Clearly, a *performance-based* covenant between a blazingly holy God and dark-hearted, sinful people wasn't going to work. And those sinful people were in no position to dictate the terms of any other covenant.

But what if this blazingly holy God were also infinitely loving and merciful? What if *He* took it upon Himself to initiate a *different kind* of covenant - one that *started* with sinful people as *sinful*? What if He took it upon Himself to place someone *in the middle* - someone to faithfully and completely *represent both sides*?

What if there were a mediator? Look again back at Hebrews 8:6 - "*But 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.*"

We never had a *mediator* before Christ. All we had were *laws* and *sacrifices, symbols* and *shadows* that screamed out our *need* for a mediator. A *sinless, eternal minister who mediates* is the kind of covenant we sinners need.

Consider what having a mediator *implies*:

- a) ***It means the two parties in the covenant have no immediate access to each other.*** If they could just each deal with the other openly there would be no *need* for a mediator.

Let this rest deeply on your mind. There is no moral possibility whatsoever for us to have ***unmediated*** access to God. Remember that each time you close your prayer time with those mindlessly repetitive words, ***“In Jesus Name.....”***
- b) ***The one mediating the covenant must be trusted by each party in the covenant.*** That is, he must have a way of ***relating*** to both sides. If he only represents ***one side*** of the covenant he can't accomplish the goal of mediation. He can't be invested on ***one side only***. He must be equally invested by both sides.
- c) ***If the parties of the covenant be of two completely different natures, the mediator in the middle must participate in each one completely.*** The necessity of this might not appear at first glance, but it is absolutely essential. If the mediator is only of ***divine nature*** he will treat sinful people with the ***terrible justice*** such divine holiness demands. If the mediator is likewise of only a ***fallen human nature***, like those he represents, he will have no more access to a holy God than they.
- d) ***The mediator must be capable to take out of the way that which keeps the covenant partners apart.*** Sin is the problem. Another set of laws can only ***define*** sin - never ***remove*** its penalty. This ***removal*** of sin was never accomplished under the old covenant, as our writer has just shown - **Hebrews 8:7 & 13** - ***“For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second....[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.”***
- e) ***The mediator must supply assurance to both parties that the terms of the covenant will be supplied to each fully.*** This Christ does for Father God by providing the actual ***human righteous keeping of the whole law*** in keeping with all the demands of divine justice. We couldn't do this. But the ***sinless man***, Christ Jesus, did. Christ supplies the covenant terms on behalf of mankind by restoring relationship with Father God as adopted sons and daughters, enjoying all the covenant provisions of mercy and pardon and adoption and eternal life.

3) **THE BLESSINGS OF THIS NEW COVENANT WILL NEVER CEASE BECAUSE THE MINISTRY OF OUR MEDIATOR IS ONGOING**

Hebrews 8:10-13 - ***“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. [11] And 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. [12] For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”[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.”***

Now, back to our opening point. When someone says, ***“I’m a Christian. I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ,”*** here's what I take them to be saying - ***“I know what has happened to me. Here's what is now true of me in increasing measure - 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”***(10).

O hear God speaking these powerful words! ***“I change the whole way of thinking in my new covenant people. I dominate their minds. They don't crave what they used to crave. They don't glory in what they used to glory in. The only deep desire they have in their hearts is my joy and my glory! They are mine in the deepest and truest sense of everything they hope for and dream about and fear!”***

I frequently find myself thinking the church needs to be reminded all over again of the ***nature*** of our relationship with the Lord Jesus. We don't set or modify the ***terms*** of that covenant relationship. Those are the only covenant realities in which our Mediator deals. He doesn't ***modify*** our lives. He ***owns*** them - ***“They will be my people!”***

Certainly it's wonderfully true that God will, ***"...remember their sins no more"***(13). But this is so the very ***residue*** of sin will be a thing of the past - not so I can ***continue in it***. He takes the ***very ghost*** of sin out of our hearts so we can start to think of holiness and purity in the terms of His Son, our Mediator, rather than our own small selves. Our ***holiness orientation feels the change***.

4) **THE GLORIES OF THE NEW COVENANT ARE NOT OUT OF ANYONE'S REACH**

Of course, all of this sounds bigger than we could ever dream of. And that's why our text wraps up with a boldness of promise:

Hebrews 8:10-11 - "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. [11] And ***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.***"

This is not a verse to deny the importance of sound teaching in the life of discipleship. How could it be when our writer has been teaching about the old and new covenants in detail for 8 chapters?

But the reality of new covenant redemption won't be a ***second-hand reality***. It can't be imparted by parents or a priest or a church or a pastor. You must enter this covenant mediated by the risen Christ yourself.

And the best news of all is ***everyone can*** - ***"...from the least to the greatest"***(11b). For all who fear the great re-creative work observed in some other life can never work the same in yours there is wondrous promise here. The fear that grace plays favorites - that others might be more qualified - all of that is erased by the equally applied fruit of our divine mediator to all participants in the new covenant. Draw near to God through Him today.