



“Covenant”

Hebrews 8

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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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. 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. 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. 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.

8:1-13

The book of Hebrews thus far has not been about what Jesus did, or His work and actions, but simply who Jesus is. Now that may seem like a small thing being that we have traveled seven chapters so far. But the writer knows that this is so critical to our faith! We have to grasp the fact that Jesus is not merely a concept or a creed. He is a person. He is God in flesh. Therefore we must wrap our minds around the fact that we are...*or should be...*cultivating a relationship with a living, thinking, acting, and, yes even feeling entity. Certainly “short of human” ...with human emotions, but yet far from the aloof and robotic deity that we often tend to think of Him as. This thing we are doing is not just some sort of belief system, but rather a kinship, a *dependence*. Literally a unity with our Father, our Creator, and hopefully, *our Lord*.

Now here in chapter 8, the author begins to change direction. He moves on to present what Jesus has actually done *for* us. For seven chapters, the author has been elaborating upon some fairly deep theological concepts, and we could wonder where he is going exactly...what exactly was his point. What, if any, was his “main idea.” Seeming to understand this, he begins chapter 8 by saying, “*This is the main point of the things we have been saying.*”

The writer tells us that all of this was to establish that we indeed have a high priest, a perfect and fitting and righteous Priest who is like that of Melchizedek. One which can indeed “stand in the gap” and both *mediate our relationship* and *broker the peace* between us and our Creator. Further, this “One” is able to do this forever, not just for a human lifetime, as with a mere earthly priest. One who can make a sin sacrifice and do it one time for

all of mankind. So for the next few chapters, the author is now going to deal with the idea that, in light of the past seven chapters of facts and figures, Jesus has now forever changed the playing field.

In verse one we have what can seem to be just a passing remark, but in fact it speaks volumes concerning this ongoing issue of our high priest. It says that our high priest is *seated*. Again, that may seem like a very minor issue, but it in truth tells us much! The original Jewish reader would no doubt pick up on this nuance immediately because the actual *position* of the priest would speak to His current work status. Meaning, if He is sitting, **He is done!** His religious work is now done. And in this case, not just the work concerning you, but *all* religious work! Jesus effectively put an end to all religion! For all religion is ultimately for the purpose of reaching out, finding and communicating with God. But Jesus reached out, found you and me, and communicated to all of mankind. He did it all...it's *finished*. It's all done now. Because the living out of Christianity isn't religion. From the start, Christianity was in fact the "anti-religion." The people *on the street* in the day this letter was penned actually called Christian's atheists. For Christianity didn't and doesn't bring you religion; **it brings you a person.**

1. Imagine a believer in that day having a conversation with his neighbor: "So you're a Christian, huh?" ...the neighbor asks. "So where is your temple?"

"Oh, we don't have temples. Our temple is inside us."

"Oh really? Well, where do your priests do their thing?"

"Oh, we don't have earthly priests. Our priest is one Jesus Christ and He lives and works inside of me."

"What? Well, how then do you worship?"

"Oh, we worship with our living."

"But how do you interact with your priest?"

"Well, we eat His flesh and drink His blood."

"Ok, you're officially crazy..."

This is how the Christians got labeled as atheists, and ultimately they started being killed for their faith and beliefs.

Throughout this chapter, the author repeatedly uses the term "covenant." But what does this word "covenant" actually mean? Firstly, you need to know that there is actually no direct English translation for the Greek word. Furthermore, it generally gets handled in a wholly inadequate way today because it is difficult to explain in English and further to an English-speaking world that culturally knows little about such connections and relationships. We in our day tend to see a covenant as an agreement, as an "I will, if you will" kind of thing. Even an, "I will as much as, ...or as far as, ...you do," or "I will obey and glorify You, God, to the degree that You bless and give to me." But there is no intimacy in that. That is a business agreement.

But a true covenant goes further. Especially the one brought by Christ. God's New Testament covenant is, "I will do even if you do not." You see, Jesus died on the cross for you, even if you reject Him! "...while we were

yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The Hebrew word “covenant” found herein is based on a root word meaning “to bind.” So it’s important to understand that a covenant is therefore binding. Found within the word is also the idea “to cut.” Thus, such pushes the idea of the agreement being “cut in stone.” So, any way you look at it, a covenant is a serious venture!

Verse 7 essentially is asking, “*If that first Old Testament covenant was enough, ...if it did the job and supplied the path to God and eternity, ...then why the second covenant? Why would we need the new one? Moreover, why Jesus? Why send Him? What then was the point?*” Chapter 8 of Hebrews essentially is asking which of these two covenants we are embracing. Which one are we living under? Because one leads to religion, and the other leads to Jesus.

But, would we even know? How do we know if we are actually operating within that New Testament covenant? How do we know where we stand today? Under the Old Testament covenant, we would have known clearly that we stood. Because in an “*I will bless you if you ‘fill in the blank’,*” and, “*I will punish you if you don’t ‘fill in the blank’,*” a person would have known where they stood by the *presence of* or the *lack of* blessing or punishment. But now God is saying, “*I will do this even if you don’t. I will perform this even if you ignore me.*” So how will I know if I am in correct standing then?

I can choose to try to remain under the old covenant of God, the Old Testament plan that says if you disobey, you will be cut off from God and His blessing. Or I can come under the new covenant that says Jesus will love me no matter what. For when I surrender to Christ, I am brought into a new covenant relationship with Him. Moreover, my participation ...my “agreeing” to the covenant, plays into it for sure, yet His doing, **His** part is unilateral and without an escape clause.

Now if I fail to grasp that fact, then I am essentially remaining under the first contract. ***How do I know if I am under this new covenant?***

#1- There will be intimacy instead of formalism. God says (verse 11), “***they will all know me.***” No hoops. No forms to fill out. Meaning, I will have a relationship with Him, not a business agreement. Example: most of us do not have an intimate relationship with our insurance agent. He or she might be a real nice person, but it is a relationship essentially just based on an agreement that says, “*We’ll cover your possessions and assets with an insurance policy against theft, fire, or damage as long as you make your premium payments each month.*” If we fail to uphold our end of the deal, they cease to cover us. It’s a renewable contract. It is essentially an Old Testament covenant. And the fact is, many of us, still living under religion, do indeed try to adhere to the old covenant, a “business agreement” with deity.

OR, you maybe have a “covenant” with a brother or sister here in the fellowship community that says to you, “*I have your back.*” If your car breaks down, they come to the rescue. If you get into a bind, they step up and help. If you need help moving, they’re there. There is not this thing ...where we’re like, “*I’m not helping you move, dude. Where were you when I moved?*” You don’t get a bill when they rescue you the night your car breaks down in the snow. You see, that because that’s a *Jesus* covenant. It’s a unity relationship but one based on a unilateral promise that says I’m here even if you’re not. It is a relationship based on love, commitment, and intimacy. Such is a less-than-perfect example of the one we are strictly speaking about here, but it helps us understand.

Now you don’t have to accept that relationship. You don’t have to allow that guy to rescue you when your car breaks down. You are free to walk and freeze instead, but that doesn’t change the covenant that that guy made. It just changes how it plays out with *you*.

God says here, “they **all** will know me.” It’s personal. It’s intimate. It’s all encompassing. It’s a *relationship*.

How do I know if I am under this new covenant?

#2 Equality verses class system: “...*they all will know me from the least to the greatest.*”

“Religion” overwhelming operates on a pervasive class system. Women couldn’t come into the temple at all. If you were sick you couldn’t come in. If you were a Gentile you couldn’t come in. There was a certain level of proximity to God for the people: one for the priests, and one even for the high priest. It still plays out that way today. You know what I’m talking about if you are still operating under the old covenant of religion! But with Jesus, ...with the new covenant, ...all are welcome. All can come to the feet of the King. All are equal.

This all translates like this: before, we had the idea that if we lived the high standard, God would love us. But now, under the new covenant we **respond** to God with, “*Since I am loved and accepted by God, I want to reciprocate by living the high standard.*” This may seem like a trivial distinction, maybe just a loophole. But in truth, it all hangs on this! It is something we have to understand... something we must grasp... if we are to operate in the Spirit. For there is a “Grand Canyon” of difference between these two paths.

Religion, ...*all religion*, ...is based on the idea that if you are doing it, then you are bridging the gap, climbing the ladder, achieving the level, attaining to the mark. Jesus, on the other hand, did it all himself. HE bridged the gap. He climbed the ladder *down*. He alone achieved the level. **He** attained to the mark.

How do I know if I am under this new covenant?

#3 Community verses individualism. “...*they shall be my people.*” Not my **person** or **persons**. They shall all be my *people*.

If your faith is based upon the old covenant, one that operates on the class system, on the principle that I am the one making this thing with God happen, you are therefore bound to look down upon others that do not attain to the same spiritual level as you, those that fail to work as hard as you or serve as much as you...and see it as a *positional* thing rather than a *commitment* thing. This is because religion *excludes*. But Jesus **includes all**, from the least to the greatest...all equally lost and all equally redeemed. All coming in through the same narrow way... the door of the cross.

The fact is, when we become part of God’s new covenant, we become a part of a greater community. The language here is very specific. Jesus does not redeem you to operate in solo mode. Attempting such only says you are still out there trying to save yourself by what you do and by what you are. You are still under the old covenant that is based on *doing* and, further, based on **you doing it**. This is a ‘hard one’ in a culture and a society that is so self-centric: where it is all about me.

Indeed, He doesn’t actually say you will, *under this new covenant inside of His salvation*, be one of the many individuals that He has a personal relationship with. Your response to Him will play a part in what you have going with Him, but such will not be the basis of it. He is saying that if you are willing, you as an individual will become **part of His people**. The people He has a relationship with. This is a fact, no matter what the popular faith-based culture is telling you today.

When we become a part of this new covenant with Christ, when we experience His salvation, we become part of a new community, a new humanity that He is creating. And what is crucial here, is, that like it or not, it is a “group thing”. Call it what you want—the church, the community, the fellowship, the body, the family, whatever—but it IS a group thing. You are agreeing to taking your place in a dynamic that is bigger than just you and in something that is essentially and ultimately about His living temple on earth, a house for the one high priest of Christianity. It’s a corporate dynamic lived out together. So let’s be very careful with language like “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Bart Ehrman, a very well respected New Testament and early Christianity historian and scholar was asked about that phrase, and he said this: *"The idea of a 'personal relationship' with Christ appears to be a modern 20th century invention, at least as it is discussed these days. Not sure where it came from."* In the book “The Reason Driven Life” by Robert Price, he states that the *"the 'personal relationship with the personal savior' rhetoric never occurs in the Bible at all. Jesus never speaks this way in the gospels; nor does Paul in the epistles."*

However, terms and concepts like body, unity, fellowship, and the like, appear *throughout* scripture and *permeate the whole faith-life model*. Jesus is indeed a priest, but He is also a king. He has redeemed you, but He did so, so you would then take your place in this new kingdom, this new people, this new community. Fact: Christianity cannot be faithfully and righteously lived out outside of a community. It simply cannot be done.

All of this does not mean we can live as we please and moreover, live like the world. Yet Jesus, in this new covenant, is saying, *“I will be faithful to you, even if you fall short in your faithfulness to me.”* When we get that, we must grasp that we therefore cannot treat church or God’s other children the opposite of this. We can’t come into church with the attitude of *“I will come to this church as long as it meets my needs, ...as long as it makes me feel good, ...as long as it recognizes my abilities and puts me in position. If that doesn’t happen, then I am out of here.”* That is not redeemed Christian dynamic. That is living out an old covenant while apparently trying to embrace the new one. Attempting a sort of a one-way contract. But such doesn't exist! At least not here. Because that’s *religion*.

Now it’s fitting that this realization cannot help but lead us all quite naturally to the idea of church covenant membership: an acknowledgment of all of these issues, an understanding, and an agreement concerning my participation here in the larger context of community. The new covenant creates covenantal people. People who look at their church and their brothers and sisters and say, *“You know, this church and these people have some flaws, but I am going to be true to them. I am going to commit myself to them, even if they sometimes fail me, sometimes fall short in my personal issues.”*

All of this new covenant picture has the effect of being both an awesome experience and at the same time a daunting, *even fearful*, thing. I mean, having God up that close—so personal, so intimate—some days and in some situations can be a beautiful thing, a blessed living! But in other situations, it can be uncomfortable and even frightening. For in such a place our souls are laid naked before him...and frankly, before everyone else. There is nothing to hide, nowhere to go. CS Lewis said, *“An 'impersonal God' -well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads -better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap -best of all. But God himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, King, husband -that is quite another matter.”*