

“The Better Promises of the New Covenant, Part 3”
(Hebrews 8:7-13)

Introduction: In our passage, the author has been comparing the Old Covenant with the New. The reason he is doing this, of course, is that He wants to show us that the New is better. It is better, most of all, because it has a better priest and better promises. Now remember, in order to fully understand this, you must bear in mind that when he talks about the Old Covenant, he is *not talking about the Abrahamic Covenant*. Instead, he is talking about the Law which was added to that covenant. He is referring to the moral law and to the sacrificial and ceremonial laws. The moral law could tell us the difference between right and wrong, but it could not give us the power to do what is right and turn away from what is wrong. The ceremonies could show us that we needed a sacrifice to remove our sins, but they could not remove our sins. But the New Covenant offers to us both the power to do what is right and the promise of the forgiveness of our sins. And that is what we will want to look at this evening as we continue to see that

In the New Covenant, the Lord promises to give us the things which the Old Covenant could never give us.

I. The first promise which God holds out to us in the New Covenant is, “I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts.”

- A. This, as we have seen, is the promise of the new birth.
1. In the Old Covenant, God gave the Law to His people written on two tablets of stone.
 2. But the problem with that Covenant was that giving them the Law was not enough. Those commandments, as holy as they are, did not have the power to change their hearts and make them willing to keep them.
 - a. If God was to put those two stone tablets up here on the stage, and you were to read them and understand what they said, that would not by itself give you the power to keep them. But the problem is not with the commandments, the problem is with your heart. You came into the world hating God and His commandments. This is what sin does to you. It makes you hate what is holy. Therefore you would never want to keep them.
 - b. You children, think about your least favorite kind of food. Let's say its cooked spinach. Now let's say that your parents serve spinach every evening for dinner, and they tell you that you must eat it, because it is good for you. Even though you don't like it, and won't eat it even though it is good for you, you will eat it, if your parents tell you that they will discipline you if you don't.
 - c. It is the same thing with the Law. It is good for you, and God says that you must keep it. But the problem is that you don't have a taste for it, when you are outside of Christ. It doesn't seem good to your wicked heart, even though you know that it is the best and right thing to do. And the Law itself is powerless to change your heart. You may keep it outwardly to avoid the

judgment of God in this life, just as the child eats the spinach to avoid the spanking, but your heart will never be in it, as long as it is dead in sin.

- B. However, in the New Covenant, God promises to change your heart and to make you willing to keep it.
1. He takes the law and puts it into your mind.
 2. He writes it upon the fleshly tablets of your heart.
 - a. This means that He does something to your heart to make you want to keep it.
 - b. He gives you the desire. And because you are now motivated from within to keep the commandments, instead of simply from without, you now do it willingly.
 - c. Children, it would be like your parents now offering you a chocolate milkshake. Very few of you, if any, would ever refuse to drink a chocolate milkshake, even if you were full from dinner. The reason is that you like them so much.
 - d. When the Lord changes your heart, you begin to look at His Law as you look at the milkshake. He makes you love His Law, so that you will want to do it from your heart.
 - e. This is the first thing which God promises in the New Covenant: a new heart. *And you may know that you are a partaker of these promises, when that heart, when that love for His commandments is in you.*

II. The second thing He promises is, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” This is the promise of adoption.

- A. Whenever God enters into a covenant with a people, they become His people, and He becomes their God.
1. This has been true of all of God’s covenants which He has made in the past.
 - a. God said to Abraham, “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be God to you and to your descendants after you*” (Gen. 17:7).
 - b. This is why God had Moses say to Pharaoh, “Let *My people* go, that they may serve Me.” He said this even before the Mosaic Covenant was established (Ex. 8:20). They were already His by virtue of the covenant made with Abraham.
 - c. And of course the Lord said to His people in the Mosaic covenant, “I will also walk among you and *be your God, and you shall be My people*” (Lev. 26:12).
 - d. This was the same promise to the same people, because they were Abraham’s children, and because they were entering into another covenant with the Lord.
 2. When God makes a covenant, He enters into a new relationship which is like that between a father and a son.
 - a. He becomes their Father, and they become His children.
 - b. He takes upon Himself the responsibility to care for them, and they take upon

themselves the responsibility to love and obey Him.

- c. One thing that you must bear in mind, however, is that this adoption by way of covenant is not always the same as salvation.
- d. The covenant can be broken. And when it is broken, a person can be put outside of the covenant community. If this happens, he is no longer considered to be a part of God's people. Nor can he then consider God to be His God.
- e. The condition of the covenant is always to love and obey God. And if God's people do not love and obey Him, they are cut off.
- f. The same thing happens in our culture. Think of a man who, out of the great kindness of his heart, adopts two children. As they grow, one of these children loves him and serves him from the heart. But the other child hates him and continually rebels against his wishes. What will the man do? Well, it wouldn't be at all strange if the man leaves everything he has to the child who loves him, and disowns and disinherits the other. The man knew what the right response to such kindness should be. It should be to love in return. But if that doesn't happen, it is not unjust of him to put the other back outside of his family. This is what God does.
- g. This can happen in a covenant relationship. But it cannot happen in salvation. For once a person is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, he can never be lost.

B. Now this is the beauty of the better promise of the New Covenant. In this covenant, those who meet its condition of faith, are given a new heart of love and obedience, and are adopted into God's eternal family. They can never be cut off.

- 1. The Old Covenant could only offer a covenantal adoption, and not the adoption into the eternal family of God, because it was a covenant of law.
 - a. It could bring you into family, in name only, but it could not give you the heart to love and obey God. It was a covenant of the letter only, and not of the Spirit.
 - b. There were people who did receive this blessing, as I said before: Those who saw the Messiah through the types and shadows, and received Him by faith, received this eternal adoption, through the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - c. But those who didn't go on through those pictures to believe in Christ, only received covenantal adoption. And when they broke that covenant, they were cut off.
 - d. And it appears from the history of the Bible, that there were many more covenant breakers, than there were covenant keepers.
- 2. But the New Covenant is a covenant of grace, and not of Law. And even though there was grace in the Old Covenant, through the Abrahamic Promise, there is an even greater revelation of grace in the New Covenant.
 - a. John writes, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Here he pictures them as opposites.

- b. The difference is this: In the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is given to change your heart and to make you willing to believe, as we saw before. He is given in even greater measure than in the Abrahamic Covenant. He is the One who makes you able to believe. And of course, once you believe, then you receive this blessing, *then you are adopted into the family of God*. Again, John writes, “But as many as received Him [that is, Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:12-13).
- c. And once you have been adopted into God’s family, you will remain in it forever! Jesus said, “And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).
- d. If you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ here this evening, then God is your God, and you are His child. And you will never perish!

III. Let us quickly move on to the third blessing. The author writes, “And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them” (v. 11).

- A. The Lord is first speaking here of the blessing of a greater knowledge.
 - 1. In the Old Covenant, the knowledge of the Lord was hidden.
 - a. It was veiled by all of the pictures and shadows.
 - b. And it was not immediately obvious what those pictures and shadows were meant to teach them.
 - c. Therefore, if you were to find the knowledge of the Lord, you had to seek. You had to look carefully. God had revealed many things about Himself and His plan in pictures, rather than words. To find Him was to find salvation. But to not find Him was to be lost.
 - 2. And, of course, since the Lord had told them that they were to love their neighbors as themselves, they also needed to help their families and everyone else around them find Him as well.
 - a. Everyone needed to teach each other. If you were a faithful Israelite living in those days, you would have needed to exhort your family and your neighbors to search for the Lord and find Him in the types.
 - b. Again, we already saw that if you stopped short at the shadows, if you thought that God had only given you a set of rituals to do, and that that was all you needed to draw near to God, then you had missed the whole point.
 - c. Wasn’t this what the Pharisees did? They were great at doing the outward things. They were very precise when it came to tithing and sacrificing and going through the ceremonies. But what they were missing was the inward part. Their hearts were full of sin and corruption. They looked like white-washed tombs, which were beautiful on the outside, but inside they were full of dead men’s bones.
 - d. This is something you must watch out for in your own lives as well. Even in the New Covenant church, worship can sometimes degenerate into a dead

formalism. It is possible for you to come here on Sundays, and go through the motions, and be very faithful in your attendance, but still not have the love for God and His Christ which needs to be in the very center of your heart. Don't let this happen to you! Make sure that Jesus has renewed your heart in love to Him.

- e. You must also watch out for your neighbors in this. If you notice that there doesn't seem to be a real love for God and Christ in their lives, exhort them to move on past the outward religion to the religion of the heart. Tell them that they need to seek Christ!
3. But of course this is much easier to do in the New Covenant, than in the Old.
 - a. In the New Covenant Jesus Christ has been revealed. He is what all of those pictures were pointing to.
 - b. With the coming of Christ, there has been such an explosion of knowledge that this previous teaching ministry is no longer necessary. All may come to His Word now and read for themselves a divine commentary on the life and work of Jesus Christ.
 - c. In this sense, all who are connected to the New Covenant, in any way, have a much greater access to the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is why I believe that the author to the Hebrews begins his book as he does. He writes, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son . . . And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (1:1-3).
 - d. God says that in the New Covenant, "All shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them."
- B. But with this explosion of knowledge also comes an explosion of true conversions.
1. As I already said, with the Spirit being poured out in even greater measure comes a greater number of converted people.
 2. The Spirit is the author of all of these blessings, and when He gives one, He gives them all to you, not just some.
 - a. If God puts His Laws into your mind and writes them upon your heart, if He adopts you into His family, if He reveals Himself to you in greater fullness, if He forgives your sins, He will certainly bring you into a personal relationship with Himself.
 - b. You cannot have one without the others.
 - c. Everyone who receives any of these blessings receives them all. Therefore, everyone who is a partaker of these promises, who is in reality a part of the New Covenant, knows God. "All shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them."
 - d. Everyone shall come in by way of profession. They will know about Christ and shall profess to know Him.
 3. But having said this, I hope you will understand that the New Covenant, like the Abrahamic and the Old Covenant, still has an external arrangement.

- a. In other words, the visible expression of that covenant, the church, is still composed of true and false believers. It is made up of the wheat and the tares.
 - b. We know this because the warnings to those in the church not to fall away. Because of the Olive Tree of Romans 11, whose branches are warned to stand by faith, lest they be broken off. By the several warnings
 - b. When you view the covenant from the whole, all know God only in the sense that they know about Him. But when viewed from the standpoint of election, all who are elect know Him. The elect are the only ones who will receive these promises.

- 3. They were to seek the Lord behind the shadows. They were to do this that they might know Him.
 - a. You can't be saved without knowledge. You need to know what it is that you are to believe. And you need to know whom you are to believe in.
 - b. This is why we do missions. If we believed that a person could be saved apart from knowing the Gospel, then we wouldn't even need to worry about getting the message out.
 - c. But they do need to know. This is why Paul writes, "How they shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).
 - d. They need to know that God might wonderfully work through His Spirit and bring them to saving faith.

- 4. In the New Covenant, there is no longer a need for this kind of teaching ministry, because of the greater revelation of God and of His will.