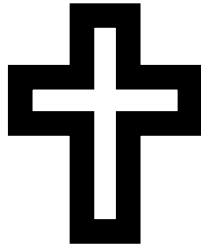


Twelve Lessons
on

Hebrews II

(Chapters 8-13)

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\$6.00

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THE BETTER COVENANT – LESSON 1

Hebrews 8:6-13

Introduction: The arguments of Paul in the first 7 chapters of the book of Hebrews were given to prepare these Jewish Christians for the important information introduced in chapter 8. These verses, which we will study, are taken from the prophecies of Jeremiah 31:31-32.

The superiority of Christ allowed for the establishment of a “new covenant.” Paul presents the new covenant as being “better” than the old covenant in that the old covenant was weak and unprofitable. Here we find the difference in works and grace.

To understand why the new covenant is superior, there must be a contrast made between the two. What is different about the old and new? Our study will focus on the facts of the two covenants. It is of utmost importance that we look at his subject from a legal perspective. We must understand why the new covenant has made the old covenant obsolete. There are many aspects of this subject which need to be discussed, but our study will focus on the legal aspect of the creation of a new covenant.

Lesson Goals:

1. Create an understanding of the fact that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant.
2. Illustrate the differences between the two covenants.
3. Review the two covenants legally to show that the old covenant has become obsolete.

Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:

1. Covenant – A mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing; a contract; stipulation. A covenant is created by deed in writing, sealed and executed; or it may be implied in the contract.
2. Annul – To make void; to nullify; to abrogate; to abolish; used appropriately of laws, decrees, edicts, decisions of courts, or other established rules, permanent usages, and the like, which are made void by competent authority.
3. Sign – Something that points to, or represents, something larger or more important than itself.

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLD COVENANT

A. The Definition of the Covenant

1. The Old Covenant is simply the Ten Commandments. Some have taught that all 39 books of the Old Testament make up the Old Covenant. This is an incorrect view.
2. It must be understood that the Mosaic Law is primarily the Ten Commandments. Although there were civil and ceremonial laws written throughout the Pentateuch, these laws found their origin in the Ten Commandments. The civil and ceremonial laws were not part of the covenant, but were in the spirit of the covenant. We may draw a comparison to the laws and ordinances of our own country. Every legal statute is not necessarily written in the Constitution of America. However, all laws and ordinances must be “constitutional.”
3. The separation of moral (Ten Commandments), ceremonial (Levitical priesthood), and civil (government of the nation) law is important to understand. We do not live under the restraints of the ceremonial and civil law today, because they were not part of the covenant. However, God’s moral law should still govern our lives if we wish to be an acceptable servant. This of course is for service only and not salvation.
4. Here are a few verses of Scripture which reveal that the Covenant is limited to the Ten Commandments.
 - a. Deut. 4:13 – *“He declared unto you his covenant... even ten commandments...”*
 - b. Exodus 34:27-28 – *“He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.”*
 - c. See Jeremiah 31:31-32; Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1-4.

B. A Description of the Covenant

1. A Covenant of Equality – Many scholars have tried to make a difference in the covenants made between men and the covenants made between men and God. They state that God never enters a binding covenant of equality with man. However, there is no difference between legal contracts made with men, or those made with God. The nature of the covenant is to place both parties on equal ground. Paul tells us this in Galatians 3:15. When speaking of the covenant of grace, he states, *“Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man’s covenant...”* He simply is explaining that God has a legal mind and enters into covenant in the same manner as men do. He enters into legal binding agreements.

2. A Covenant of Willing Acceptance – Most people hold the idea that the first covenant, the Ten Commandments, was a covenant of necessity on Israel’s part. Many believe they were forced to accept the terms of the covenant. This is also an incorrect understanding of the Old Covenant. The old covenant made between God and Israel was one of willing acceptance. We read in Exodus 19:3-8, *“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me...And Moses came... and laid before their faces all these words... And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.”* These verses describe a negotiation between God and Israel. Moses acted as a mediator to work out an agreement between Israel and God. Israel was not forced to accept the covenant.

C. The Details of the Covenant

1. The Sign of the Covenant – Every covenant demands a sign and the sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the keeping of the Sabbath. Read Ex. 31:12-13; 16-17. Notice the signs of the following covenants.
 - a. The Noahic Covenant – The sign was a rainbow. Gen. 9:8-15
 - b. The Abrahamic Covenant – The sign was circumcision. Gen. 17:9-14
 - c. The Covenant of Jacob – The sign was a pillar and oil. Gen 28:3
 - d. The Davidic Kingdom – The sign was salt. II Chr. 13:5
2. The Failure of the Covenant – Hebrews 8:8 – *“For finding fault with them...”*
 - a. The covenant was immediately broken by the actions of the Israelites. The nation had just promised to obey God. They said, *“All that the Lord has spoken, we will do.”* Psalms 106:13 states, *“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel.”*
 - b. Before Moses could return the words of the people to God, the people of Israel had violated the very first commandment agreed upon. *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”*
3. The Condemnation of the Covenant – Deut. 30:17-18 – *“But if thine heart turn away... ye shall surely perish.”* The failure of Israel to hold up their side of the covenant caused them to suffer the judgment of God. The condemnation is the fact that *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* Ezekiel 18:20
 - a. Gal. 3:10 – *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”*
 - b. Gal. 3:22 – *“But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin...”*
 - c. Romans 3:23 – *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW COVENANT

A. The Purpose of the New Covenant

1. The Old Covenant was not given to justify man. Rather it revealed his weakness and exposed his wickedness. The purpose of the law was to condemn man and thus bring him to Christ, understanding his helplessness before a righteous and holy God. The law could never justify man because all men have transgressed it. They have broken one of the 10 agreements. James proclaimed that *“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* (James 2:10) Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, *“Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*
2. The purpose of the New Covenant was to do for man what the old covenant could not do, and in making the New Covenant the Old Covenant became obsolete. We must here understand the legality of an old and new contract. The old covenant is still in effect until a new covenant is agreed upon and signed by all parties involved. When God said, *“I will make a new covenant”*, He was acknowledging the fact that the Old Covenant was out-dated.
3. The following is an example of the annulment of the old covenant. Let’s say I have a loan with a bank, and I am required to pay \$500 per month. Suddenly, due to unforeseen difficulties, I am unable to make my payments. The bank now has a legal right to take me to court. My condemnation will be based upon the terms of agreement in the contract. Realizing my situation, I go to the banker and request that a new contract be drawn up that will allow me to pay the debt at a lower amount over a longer period of time. The bank is in no way obligated to create a new contract. However, because of the “graciousness” of the banker, he draws up a new contract. Immediately when I and the banker sign this new contract the old contract is made legally void. I can never again be held to the terms of that old contract.
4. The illustration above is exactly the way God looks at man’s salvation. Under the terms of the Old Covenant man is condemned. However, if man will accept the terms of the New Covenant, he will no longer be under the jurisdiction of the old. This is the purpose of the New Covenant: Salvation by the

gracious act of Almighty God.

5. This is why John wrote, *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* (John 8:36) Paul also proclaimed this truth when he wrote, *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."*(Rom. 8:2)

B. The Promises of the New Covenant – Hebrews 8:6-13

1. The New Covenant is gracious. The Old Covenant was characterized by the need for the obedience of Israel. The New Covenant is characterized by the sole obligation resting upon God. The Old Covenant was characterized by the phrase "WE WILL". The New Covenant is based upon the statement "I WILL." The weakness of the law was that it rested upon the ability of man, but the provisions of the New Covenant are based upon the strength of God's holiness.
2. The New Covenant is internal, not external. Warren Wiersbe made the following observation. "The Old Covenant was written with the finger of God upon tablets of stone, but the New Covenant is written by the Spirit on the human heart and mind." God has placed within the believer the power to overcome.
3. The New Covenant promises a close relationship with God.
 - a. *"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people"*
 - b. *"for all shall know me"*
4. The New Covenant promises forgiveness of sins, Hebrews 8:12. What could not be accomplished by the shedding of blood of bulls and goats was accomplished through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.
5. The New Covenant is an everlasting promise that will take the believer into eternal bliss.

C. The Proofs of the New Covenant

1. The Annulment of the Sabbath – Believers today do not worship on Saturday because the Sabbath was the sign of the old covenant. When the Old Covenant was annulled, the sign of the covenant was also annulled. To continue the observance of the Sabbath would connect the believer's salvation with the works of the Law. This is why Paul said in Galatians that we should not observe holy days. The church met on Sunday to show their independence from the Law of Moses.
2. The Rending of the Veil in the Temple – This event revealed the end of the atonement of sins by the sacrifices of animals. The ordinances of the Old Covenant ended with its annulment. The Levitical priesthood was no longer needed to cover sins.
3. The Priesthood was changed from Levitical to the order of Melchisedec. The acceptance of the priesthood of Christ tells us that the Levitical priesthood had become obsolete because the covenant which gave it power had also been made obsolete.
4. Paul argued against legalism in the church. The law of Moses is not to be combined with the administration of the church. Paul even rebuked Peter for his return to legalistic practices in Galatians.