

LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 8:1-13

For Discussion: What is the greatest commitment you've made to someone? What sets that commitment apart from lesser promises?

Read Hebrews 8:1-13

For review: In Hebrews 7:11-28, the author addressed a fundamental flaw of the Levitical priesthood that necessitated its replacement by the priest of the order of Melchizedek, namely its inability to perfect the worshipper of God. This new high priest would have better qualifications than the existing priests (E.g., holiness, an indestructible life, everlasting office in accordance with God's oath), and thus a better ministry. From there the author highlights a final difference between the priests of these two orders, bringing together his preceding arguments and showing his readers the point toward which he has been building: God has established a new and better covenant with His people, one whose mediator and guarantor is this priest from the greater priesthood of Melchizedek.

After addressing at length Jesus' superiority as high priest over the Levitical high priests in terms of His attributes, His service, and His character, the author highlights one final area in which Jesus surpasses those who served under the Levitical system. Where do each of these priests perform their service (v.1-5; Heb. 9:24)?¹

Why is the place where Jesus serves better?²

¹Having been exalted after His death (Heb. 7:26), Jesus has His ministry in the true tent of heaven (v.2), while the Levitical high priests have theirs in an earthly copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

-Jesus does not simply serve in God's presence, He is seated at the right hand of God's throne, a position of privilege, authority, and trust.

²The heavenly tabernacle that was set up by God is true and lasting, while the earthly one that was set up by man is a mere image and is passing away (v.13).

For further thought: Moses was instructed to reproduce on earth exactly what was revealed to him about heaven (v.5). Because the earthly tabernacle was created to reflect something real, it does not stand independent of it. It has the responsibility to accurately convey that reality. This principle applies to more than just the tabernacle: a husband and wife in their marriage represents the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:22-33) and every human being bears the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). These temporal earthly images were created with purpose and are tasked with reflecting eternal heavenly realities. We do not have the freedom to redefine/remake them into something else. Do we exercise the attributes/qualities that God has granted to us, in the relationships He has given us, in a way that brings heavenly truths into view for the world?

The new priest from the priesthood of Melchizedek is one who mediates a new covenant that is better than the one that was previously in effect (v.6). A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more parties to fulfill specific terms (E.g., performing certain actions). It is a solemn promise that joins those who are involved in a partnership with each other. Like with oaths, God was under no obligation to offer this, which makes it remarkable that He would bind Himself to sinful people with something as irrevocable as a covenant. In all covenants between God and men, God is the one who initiates and establishes its terms and people are the beneficiaries.

To demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant, the author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 to show that God Himself recognized that the old covenant was lacking and had a plan from long ago to supersede it with a better one. What fault did God find with the old covenant (Lev. 18:4-5 & Jas. 2:10-11)?

-It was possible for the old covenant to fail because it was contingent on the obedience of sinful people (v.9b).

-The old covenant required complete and perfect obedience from the one who trusted in the law to be able to live by it (Jas. 2:10-11).

-This means that fault lay with the people whenever the covenant was broken – "But God found fault with *the people* and said:..." (v.8, NIV84).

-Even when Israel studied and internalized God's commands (Deut. 6:6-9), the people repeatedly showed that they lacked the ability to remain faithful.

-Under the old covenant people accumulated transgressions and alienated themselves from God, while under the new covenant people are forgiven their sins and restored to right relationship with God.

The author presents the new covenant using the same reasoning that he used to argue for the necessity of a new priesthood (Heb. 7:11), that what is flawless and complete leaves no room to speak of any other (v.7). In what ways is the new covenant superior to the old (v.6)?¹ What does God promise to those who become members of the new covenant through Christ (v.10, 11, 12; Heb. 4:1-11)?²

¹The new covenant is enacted on better promises, which specifically address the faults of the old covenant.

¹The onus for faithfulness is on God instead of us – He is the subject of the verbs in its terms (v.10-12).

²God will put His laws into people's minds and hearts (v.10).

-The law can't transform people's hearts (Heb. 7:18-19), an act of God is needed to change their wills and desires.

-People receiving God's laws in their hearts is synonymous with them receiving new hearts (**Eze. 11:19-20**).

²People will receive a deeper revelation of God (v.11).

-People will have personal and experiential knowledge of God.

-Instead of the relationship being vicarious through the high priest entering God's presence on their behalf, worshippers are invited to approach Him directly (Heb. 4:16, 7:25).

-People's experience of God's presence with them will be an indwelling one as well (Eze. 11:19a).

²God will forgive all of His people's sins (v.12).

-The consequence of people's unfaithfulness to the old covenant was that God turned away from them – "...and I turned away from them, declares the Lord" (v.9, NIV84).

-The unfaithfulness that was shown under the old covenant will be dealt with, both the consequences as well as the underlying cause.

²People will enter into God's Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1-11).

-There is no longer any need to strive to become acceptable before God as this is fully accomplished by Christ.

Despite being freed from having to earn God's approval through the law, our sinful tendency can be to still reserve parts of our lives to take pride in our own accomplishments and retain a sense of self-sufficiency and independence from God. What are some ways that Christians can still live as though they are under a covenant of works instead of grace?¹ Are there areas where you have been living like your actions or lifestyle contribute to your acceptability before God?² What would it look like for you to bring those to the Lord and live out of the grace Christ gives instead?³

¹Things that are neutral or good can take our eyes off God when we view them as personal merits => God cares as much about where our heart is focused (1 Sam. 16:7) as what we do.

¹Examples: "moral" living, church attendance, ministry involvement, spiritual disciplines (E.g., devotional times, prayer, Bible study), community engagement, giving/volunteering.

-Ask whether you expect your standing with God to change if you did something more/better or if you didn't do it at all.

³Surrendering things to God does not necessarily mean giving them up but, rather, viewing them in light of what Christ has done and how we stand before God on account of it.

-Only when we live/serve with the right attitude is God truly glorified (1 Cor. 10:31).

Reflection and application

The exalted Son mediates from heaven a new and superior covenant that features the better promises of a new heart, personal relationship with God, and genuine forgiveness of sins. This represents the transition from a covenant of "you shall" (Ex. 20:1-17) to a covenant of "I will" (v.10-12). There is a movement from prescription to description and from uncertainty to certainty. God has taken upon Himself the burden for covenant faithfulness and what He has committed Himself to, He will certainly fulfill.

In the days of Jeremiah, people were only able to see a glimpse of what God was planning, they were in a time of waiting for the fulfillment of His words. They knew God as a covenant maker but could never have imagined the extent of the grace He was preparing to show. Consider the rigours of the old covenant system of law and sacrifice and how even that was insufficient to restore us to God. Now that God has fulfilled in Christ the requirement to perfectly follow His law in order to live, we have the freedom to follow Him out of the love of a transformed heart rather than the need to justify ourselves in His sight.