

Hebrews Chapter 9: The New Covenant

Review:

Hebrews is one of the longest epistles in the New Testament.

The author of Hebrews is unknown, but he was very knowledgeable of the Greek Old Testament and was an associate of Timothy.

This letter was written about 65 AD to Jewish Christians living in Rome under the evil rule of Nero.

These new believers that had put their faith in Christ were not only facing persecution from Nero, but were also mocked by Gentiles, avoided and rejected by fellow Jews, and were often homeless, without families, jobs, or support from friends.

The author's purpose was to remind them of who Christ is and what He has done for them, and to encourage them to stay strong in their faith and not turn back to the old ways of the Jewish religion of their forefathers.

A. Spiritual struggles of the believers:

Prone to drift from the word of God, because they were neglecting it. The Gospel brings with it a responsibility to it.

The author warns these believers and us not to neglect the word of God, otherwise you're going to find yourselves drifting from it.

Had divided hearts, which led to hardened hearts. They didn't fully trust God. A divided heart is also a distracted heart, brought about by compromise in one's life.

The author makes a plea for them to preserve in the faith, holding on to their confidence and hope in Jesus Christ.

Spiritually immature and were not maturing in the way they should. Their hearts had become so hardened to the point their spiritual hearing became dull.

Like these believers, if we don't rightly understand who Jesus is and what He has done, we too, will neglect our responsibility, causing us to drift from His word and then suffer from a divided heart. The outcome will be suffering God's consequences, rather than savoring His blessings.

The writer rebukes them for their lack of spiritual maturity, which showed in their desiring milk rather than meat. They also lacked discernment between good and evil and contemplated giving up their new found fellowship with Christ, to turn back to the old religious system of their Jewish forefathers.

Resources: The Epistle to the Hebrews by F. F. Bruce; Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Hebrews by Charles Swindoll; The Wiersbe Bible Commentary; NLT Parallel Study Bible; Hebrews by Matthew Z. Capps; Hebrews Life Change Series; The Illustrated A to A Guide to Bible People by Christopher D. Hudson
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The author had to rally and rouse these believers so that they would not only press on toward the reward, but that they would also be ready to receive the greatest, most profound truth that he was about to tell them. The truth that Jesus, who is better than anything, came along and made the old religious system of law obsolete.

The writer knew this truth was going to be so deep and profound, and such a foreign concept that in their spiritual state, rather than digest it, they would disregard it.

B. Superiority and sufficiency of Christ:

The writer's main theme throughout the book of Hebrews is the superiority and sufficiency of Christ.

The writer proves this by showing Christ's power and authority as Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

The One with power to create the entire universe, is the One with the power to rule over it. Nothing comes into existence without Him and everything is subject under Him. He is the God of the universe, the God of the ages.

The writer also shows that Christ, the Son embodies God's nature.

To behold Christ is to behold the Father. Though God and His Son are two distinct beings, what is found in God is also found in Christ. They share the same striking characteristics that set them apart from anyone or anything.

The author points out Christ's superiority over the angels. Angels were regarded very highly in the Jewish religion, because they often delivered messages from God. The writer's point to these believers: if you heeded the message that was brought by angels, how much more you should then heed the message brought by Christ, who is the very word of God.

The writer explains Christ's superiority over Moses. Moses was a mighty man of God, but all that he was able to accomplish was never done by his own power. Only by the power of God could Moses or we do anything.

Moses delivered a group people from physical bondage, but Jesus Christ, the son of God, came to deliver all people from spiritual bondage.

The writer then shows Jesus' superiority over his own humanity. Because of His time on earth, and his battle with the devil in death, He is able to understand us and our troubles.

Christ's humanity made Him our compassionate High Priest.

Since Jesus is our perfect High Priest, the writer had to then prove Christ's authority over Aaron, the first human high priest. And then showed how the order of Melchizedek is superior to Aaron.

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Like Christ, Melchizedek has no beginning and no end. He has always existed and will for all eternity. Unlike Aaron, he is both a king and a priest. Therefore, every aspect of Melchizedek's origin, status, and authority as depicted here in Scripture is exactly what Christ, Himself, embodies.

Melchizedek is not only greater than Aaron, he has replaced Aaron. It is no longer the order of Levi, it is forever the order of Melchizedek.

Since there was a change in this priesthood, there also had to be a change in the law, since the priesthood of Aaron was established under the original law, the old covenant.

Christ not only uprooted the law, he fulfilled it. And now because of Him, instead of condemnation, we have grace.

Christ's place of honor and the fact He is eternally both our King and High Priest, He has been given a ministry far superior to the old covenant.

Argument of the new covenant (chapter 8)

1. The new covenant brings inward motivation and strength, rather than outward regulations.

With so many rules and regulations under the old covenant, it was work to fully obey them. Obedience came from a place of dread and fear of external consequences.

With the new covenant, we have the Holy Spirit who helps us in times of weakness, helping us grow more mature in our relationship with God. With the new covenant, obedience comes from a place of delight rather than dread.

2. The new covenant brings an intimate relationship with God, rather than a distant fear.

Under the old covenant, the people stood at a distance trembling in fear as God spoke to Moses. God's law was written on stone tablets.

With the new covenant, God has written His instructions, His Word on our hearts, therefore, He lives in our hearts.

It is now in our conscience, not in a cloud that God speaks to us.

Because of Christ, we not only have direct access to Him, but He welcomes us as His child and as a friend. We can run to Him to with our cares and our burdens.

3. The new covenant brings a confident hope and assurance, rather than insecurity and uncertainty.

Under the old covenant, God was primarily viewed as an angry Judge ready to punish or destroy all who sinned. Yes, God is holy and just and cannot tolerate sin, but because of Christ, this new covenant ushers in grace.

Now, when God looks at us, He doesn't see our sin, He sees His perfect, sinless Son. We can rest assure that our salvation is secure.

4. The new covenant brings complete forgiveness and mercy, rather than failure and law breaking.

With so many rules and regulations under the old covenant and system of law, religion became legalism. The religious leaders and priests were quick to point out your failure to keep the law and were just as quick to punish you for it.

But when Jesus came, He brought grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Argument of the new covenant continued (Chapter 9):

5. The new covenant allows access to God freely to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Set up and tear down of the Tabernacle was done so by God's design and His command, but built by human hands. Once the Tabernacle was in place that was the only place God would dwell. God's presence was localized and only for a localized group of people, Israel.

Furthermore, the tabernacle was off limits to the people. Only the priests and Levites were granted permission to enter. And then only the high priest could enter directly into God's presence in the inner most holy room—the holy of holies.

But, under the new covenant, all people who believe and put their trust in Christ have become royal priests and our bodies a temple where God dwells.

Since Christ has given us direct access to God freely, anywhere, anytime, then we should not let anything keep us from going to Him.

6. The new covenant focuses on inward cleanliness, making us right with God.

Rules and regulations of the old system that eventually became religious rituals were centered on outward cleanliness, therefore were never going to cleanse a person on the inside.

These believers were tempted to turn back to this system of worship because it was all they had known. It was very familiar to them, even comforting.

One commentary said “they probably thought if they could just get back to a secure routine, or a certain religious ritual, somehow they could find rest for their souls and relief for their consciences.”

Nothing we do for God on the outside is going to make us right with Him on the inside.

Being right with God is not based on a feeling or a religious action. It's based on our belief in who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross.

Being made right with God is not something done on our part, because, as the apostle Paul said, no one can boast.

If we are to do anything for God, it should be done with a pure and sincere heart to serve Him out of love and gratitude, or with an attitude of wanting to know Him more—not masked with the desire to make our weary, uneasy souls feel better.

7. The new covenant requires only one sacrifice.

It was sacrificial blood that made it safe for the priest to enter the holy of holies. And since a fresh entry was required each year so it was too with the blood. Hence the repeated sacrifices.

But after Christ shed His blood for us, He rose from the grave and entered into the eternal sanctuary, not made by human hands, where His blood remains fresh forever.

The sacrificial blood of goats and calves only covered one's sins, but the sacrificial blood of Christ has removed them once and for all.

And now that Christ had entered into this eternal sanctuary, He is our forever High Priest representing us before God now and always.

We can walk in freedom, knowing Jesus Christ has made us right with God now and forever.

8. The new covenant gives eternal life and escape from God's judgement.

Just as death is someday unavoidable to all, so is the day when all must face the holy God of the universe and give an account of his or her life.

But for those of us who have put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ we can escape eternal judgment that rightly comes as a consequence of sin against a holy and just God.

This divine truth brings hope and excitement for our life to come and brings joy in this one too.

The more we bathe ourselves in this truth the more we will want to live for Him and the more we will want to become like Him. To be holy as He is holy.

The more and more this truth sinks in, we will look with anticipation of His glorious return.

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Conclusion:

The early Christians who received and read this letter knew they had a choice to make. It was time to respond.

It was either turn back to their old temple worship where it was safe and familiar, and made life easier, or declare their loyalty to Christ at all costs.

Christ didn't give just half of His life on the cross. He went through that all the mocking and humiliation, all the beatings, all the torture, all the pain, and died completely for these believers, as well as for you and for me.

For Christ there was no compromise. He gave us His all that we might have the best—Him and heaven.

Does Christ have your complete loyalty?

Homework Questions:

1. In your own words, explain why the need for God to issue a new covenant.
2. How does having direct access to God impact your life and your faith?
3. What lies and excuses have you seen the devil throw to keep you or someone else from drawing near to God?
4. Explain why the rules and regulations under the old covenant were never going to cleanse a person on the inside?
5. Discuss why being made right with God is not based on a feeling or a religious action, but based on our belief in who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross.
6. Explain why without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
7. When comparing the old and new covenants, what truth has resonated or stood out the most to you?

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8. Does knowing that Christ, our forever high Priest, is in heaven presenting your needs and service to God as an offering effect your relationship with Him? Why or why not?

9. Does knowing that one day, you will have to give an account for your life before God effect the way you live today? If so, how?

10. Do you eagerly await Christ's return? Why or why not?

Personal Questions:

What keeps you from drawing near to God?

Are there any practices you do in your worship that have become ritualistic? Pray and ask God to help you see Him in fresh ways that your worship of Him becomes fresh and pure.

Do ever struggle with guilt and shame, and find yourself trying to earn God's grace? If so, pray and ask God to help you embrace His grace today and walk in freedom of the work that has already been done for you.

Does Christ have your complete loyalty? Pray and ask God to reveal areas of weakness and His help to live wholeheartedly for Him each day.

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