

Awesome Covenant

Hebrews 8:1-13

As humans, we typically do not respond well to change. We don't like it when our favorite restaurant alters its menu. We don't like when stores change their payment systems. As Christians, we also acknowledge that we sometimes have a really difficult time with change. We can struggle if communion is moved to a different time during the service, or if we have five songs one week instead of four. Sometimes the smallest changes can cause uneasiness for any person because we don't like change. If we can struggle with altering the time to take communion, imagine the struggle the Jews had when they heard that their Old Covenant had been made "obsolete", and a New Covenant had been ushered in.

In Hebrews 8, the author helps clarify to his audience the beauty that is the New Covenant. He explains that Jesus has tied the two covenants together, and that it is something that mankind should be incredibly thankful for. In the Old Covenant, man only had "copies" of Heaven through things like the tabernacle, temple, ceremonial washings, and sacrifices. However, Jesus is not just a copy – He is the real deal. He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 8:1). His new Covenant is a blessing.

1. Mankind's struggle with change is not a thing of the past. In our world today, what is changing for Christianity (for good or for bad) that might cause some hesitation or "kickback" from believers?

Attainable: The Old Covenant involved a certain standard of holiness from the Jews. God told them that if they stayed faithful and followed God, He would stay faithful and stay with them. God kept His side of the bargain. He took them out of Egypt, fed them, led them, protected them, and loved them. However, we know from the countless stories in the Old Testament that Israel did not keep their end of the bargain very well. Because of God's great love, He did not simply disappear from His people forever, but said that He would make a New Covenant. Quite often, we look at what God expected of the Jewish nation and frown upon them for so easily falling away from what God has asked of them – holiness. However, as Jared pointed out, we are held to the same standard – holiness (1 Peter 1:16). God asks us to live a life of holiness. However, like the Jewish nation, we know that we can never live a life of perfect holiness. That is exactly why the New Covenant through Jesus is so amazing. As Jared pointed out, we often forget that Jesus' life of perfect holiness is just as important as His death. His perfect life is what makes His death so powerful. His perfect life enabled Him to take on the consequences of our imperfect holiness. The Old Covenant had no permanent remedy for sin, but the New Covenant did (Hebrews 7:11). The New Covenant allows us to be made holy, and thus **attainable**, through Christ.

2. Read 1 Peter 1:15-16. Does it feel intimidating to be asked to be holy like God is holy?
3. The language that is used here in 1 Peter 1:15-16 is often used between a father and child. It's imitation language. The sermon last week focused largely on imitation and this verse is a direct command to imitate the Father. How can we be holy like the Father is holy? Is this too lofty of a goal?

Internal: The Jewish religion was based around multiple physical and visible practices. They had exact instructions on how the tabernacle was to be built. The Torah was copied in an exact way on special parchment, with a special pen. They were to wear clothes only made out of certain cloths, and to only eat certain foods that were considered clean. Everything they did was based around God’s written word to His people – the law. Thus, when the people heard that God would one day dwell with them and that the law would be written on their hearts and minds (Heb. 8:10-11), it would have been incredibly hard to comprehend. The book of Hebrews clarifies that the New Covenant brings God to not only dwell with His people, but transforms His people. The Holy Spirit has come as part of the New Covenant, and He transforms us. The Holy Spirit allows a unique and incredibly intimate relationship between God and man. The Holy Spirit provides a new road towards wisdom, strength, power, and holiness.

4. How have you witnessed the transformative nature of the Holy Spirit in your own life?
5. Another thing that makes this New Covenant internal is the state of relationship between God and His people. The Old Covenant did not provide a personal relationship between God and His people, but this New one does. What about relationship causes this Covenant to be more “powerful” than the Old Covenant?

Eternal: Because of the New Covenant ushered in by God, every person who has accepted Christ will walk in knowledge of the Lord and have the Spirit of God within him/her. Jesus’ perfect life, death, and resurrection redefines and redeems man’s relationship with God. The ways of the Old Covenant sacrifices, separation, and eternal consequences of sin are vanquished – forever (Heb. 8:12). We no longer need earthly high priests because Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God. Whereas earthly high priests could only stand in the presence of God for a short time once a year, Christ is seated (a sign that His work is finished) at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19).

6. The sacrifice of Christ’s death is the greatest display of grace imaginable. Because we no longer have to offer up sacrifices for our sin, do you think we have lost sight of how truly despicable our sin is? How can we stay aware of how horrific our sin is to God?
7. Even though the Old Covenant is no longer useful in connecting to God or dealing with sin, we are told that Scripture is still useful (2 Timothy 3:16). How is the Old Testament still relevant to us today?

Additional Texts

Jer. 31:31-34 * Rom. 11:27 * 2 Cor. 3:6-11 * 2 Cor, 5:17 * 1 Pt. 1:15-16 * 1 Jn. 2:27

Deeper Look

- Hebrews 8:7- “The law in its *morality* was *blameless*; but in *saving us* it was defective, and so not *faultless*.”
- Hebrews 8:9- The phrase “took them by the hand” is juvenile language. God is emphasizing the immaturity of His people, and their need for His guidance.