

Henry Ow
HCC Sermon
08/03/2025

A Better Covenant
Hebrews 8:1-9:14

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Growing up, I cherished one possession over all others. My Gameboy.
2. Need: The new often surpasses the old
 - a. Transition: Although we have a new life in Christ, we find ourselves drifting/returning to our old ways.
 - b. The hearers of Hebrews though they experienced a new life in Christ they found themselves tempted to return to their old life in Judaism.
3. Subject: Why should we continue embracing our new life in Christ rather than return to our old ways? [Need transition to intro new covenant. It might be helpful to explain covenant here.]
4. Text: Hebrews 8:1-9:14
5. Preview: This morning, we'll look at three reasons why the new covenant is better.

BODY

- I. The new covenant is better because we have a better high priest (8:1-6).
 - A. The author of Hebrews reminds his listeners that Christ is the better high priest (8:1-6)
 1. Jesus is better than any priest in the Old Testament.
 - a. He is better than any Aaronic high priest.
 - b. He is better than Melchizedek.
 2. Jesus is a better high priest because he reigns as the priest king (8:1)
 3. Jesus is a better high priest because he serves in the true presence of God rather than a replica (8:2)
 4. Jesus is a better priest because he is the new mediator between God and man (8:3-6)
 - a. The former priest had to offer sacrifice regularly to mediate between God and man.
 - b. Jesus became the mediator through his death and resurrection
 - B. Every self-help/religious leader can show you how to live a good life but only Christ has achieved a good life on your behalf.
 - C. Continue to look to Christ for help rather than others.

- II. The new covenant is better because we have a better promise (8:7-13).
 - A. The author of Hebrews explains that the new covenant promises to transform you (8:7-13).
 - 1. The old covenant failed to change the heart of Israel so that it could keep the covenant (8:7-9) [Citation of Jeremiah]
 - 2. Jeremiah anticipated when God would establish a new covenant with Israel that would transform them (8:10-12). [Expand on transformation]
 - a. The new covenant would enable Israel to internalize the law (8:10)
 - b. The new covenant would enable Israel to know God (8:11)
 - c. The new covenant would enable Israel to experience forgiveness of sin (8:12)
 - 3. The new covenant replaces the old covenant (8:13)
 - B. Although we promise to change, we lack the ability to produce lasting change.
 - C. Recognize that deep transformation comes only through the promise of the new covenant.
- III. The new covenant is better because we have a better purification (9:1-14)
 - A. The author of Hebrews explains the old covenant rituals failed to purify a person completely (9:1-10)
 - 1. The author of Hebrews explains the setup of the tabernacle (9:1-5)
 - 2. The author of Hebrews explains how the work of the high priest failed to purify Israel from sin (9:6-10)
 - B. The author of Hebrews explains that only the new covenant through Christ purifies a person completely (9:11-14)
 - C. The complete purification of the new covenant enables you to enter the presence of God without reservation.
 - D. Thank God for the better purification that you receive under the new covenant.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: The new covenant is better for three reasons. First, we have a better high priest. Second, we have better promise. Third, we have a better purification.
- 2. Closing Image:

MANUSCRIPT

Growing up, I cherished one possession above all others. One toy above my action figures. One object that commanded my attention. **My Gameboy.** Now some of you may not know what a Gameboy is. But it was a portable device that enabled you to play games in black and white. Think of it as the forerunner of a handheld Nintendo switch.

I loved my Gameboy because it allowed me to play different video games. Super Mario Land. Zelda. Mega Man. Pokémon.

But a new portable video game device later took the place of number one in my life. The Gameboy Advance. This new Gameboy allowed me to play games in color. It also had an updated sound system. It also weighed less. Instead of spending time on my old Gameboy, I found myself spending more time on my new Gameboy Advance.

This experience with my Gameboy made me think that **the new often surpasses the old.** My Gameboy Advance surpassed my Gameboy. But it also applies other things as well. Your new car uses fuel more efficiently than your old car. Your new phone has features that enable you to do more than your old phone. Your new computer is lighter and faster than your old one. Your new air conditioning unit cools the room more efficiently than your old unit. **The new often surpasses the old.**

This principle applies not only to our possessions, but it also applies to our spiritual lives. Our new life in Christ should surpass our old lives apart from Him. We experience greater benefits after we believed in Christ than when we lived in unbelief.

Although we have a new life in Christ, we find ourselves returning to our old ways. We find ourselves tempted to revisit old sinful habits. We discover ourselves longing for the old days rather than enjoying the benefits of a new life in Christ.

But we are not the only ones struggling with this desire to return to our old lives. Even early believers in this church contemplated leaving their new life in Christ to return to their old lives apart from Him. Following Christ, while it has its advantages, it also has its challenges. In the world of the early church, families would disown Christians. Roman society marginalized Christians for their beliefs. They persecuted Christians for their beliefs by beating them and even killing them.

Even today, these struggles exist. Families disown members for their faith in Christ. Some societies imprison and torture Christians. Companies refuse to promote Christians for their beliefs. People describe Christians with unflattering terms.

With all these difficulties, why should one continue to follow Christ? Why should they persist to identify as a follower of Christ? Why should believers claim to have a relationship with God, when such a relationship paints a bullseye on your back?

It would be so much easier to return to unbelief. It would be less painful to return to a life prior to faith in Christ. It will cause us less stress if we no longer identify as a follower of Christ.

But I would argue that a return to the old ways would be a mistake. It would be a grave error to think you would be better off returning to a life apart from Jesus. Returning to your old life would cause more trouble than continuing in your faith in Christ.

Why? **Why should we continue embracing our new life in Christ rather than return to our old ways?** Why should we persist in following Jesus rather than abandon him? Why should we persevere in living for Jesus rather than living for ourselves?

To answer this question, we'll return to the letter of Hebrews where the listeners of this letter struggled with the same temptation. They felt the temptation to abandon Christ and return to a life of Judaism. Return to living under the Mosaic law. Return to temple worship. But the author of Hebrews argues that returning to Judaism is not a choice at all. In fact, returning to Judaism would put them in a more dire spiritual place.

We'll look specifically a passage beginning in **Hebrews, chapter 8**. If you have your Bibles, then please turn with me there. Hebrews, chapter 8. I appreciate John reading this morning's passage in its entirety. Again, we'll be in **Hebrews, chapter 8**.

In his passage, we'll be introduced to the concept of a covenant. A covenant within the Bible describes how God and man relate to one another. For instance, God makes a covenant with Abraham promising to bless him with offspring and a land. Or think about how God makes a covenant with David promising that his descendants would continue to sit on the throne of Israel. But in this passage, the author argues that the new covenant that God establishes with people through Christ is superior to the old covenant that God had with Israel through the Mosaic law.

This morning, we'll look at three reasons that the new covenant is better than the old. Three explanations why the new covenant is superior to the old. Three arguments

for why the new covenant surpasses the old covenant. **Again, we'll look at three reasons why the new covenant is better than the old.**

Let's look at the first reason. **The new covenant is better because we have a better high priest.** This new arrangement between us and God through Christ is better because we have a superior minister. We have better mediator. A more qualified intercessor. **The new covenant is better because we have a better high priest.**

The author of Hebrews reminds his listeners that we have a better high priest in Jesus Christ. He reiterates his point that no high priest is like Jesus. No one even comes close to the priesthood of Jesus. If you've been with us the last two weeks, then you'll remember that **his argument thus far is that Jesus is better than any priest in the Old Testament.** He surpasses an Aaronic high priest. He is better than even Melchizedek.

The author of Hebrews cites again the superiority of Jesus's priesthood in the opening verses of chapter 8. He cites three reasons for Jesus's better priesthood. First, **he states that Jesus is a better high priest because he reigns as a priest king.** Look at verse 1. *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.* Majesty in heaven serves as a descriptor of God. Jesus sits at his right hand. The right hand represents a position of authority. Jesus serves as God's king and priest who reigns over all things.

Jesus is not only a better high priest because he reigns as a priest king, but **he is a better high priest because he serves in the true presence of God rather than a replica.** Look at verse 2. *A minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.*

Remember that in the Old Testament, that the presence of God dwelt in a tent called a tabernacle. Israel constructed this tabernacle after it received the law at Mount Sinai. The tabernacle represented the dwelling place of God. It's where one would meet with the presence of God. But the tabernacle only served as a replica of God's heavenly dwelling place. It serves as a mockup. A model. High priests in the Old Testament would serve in the tabernacle which mimicked God's heavenly dwelling place. Jesus, on the other hand, serves in God's actual heavenly dwelling. He has an access that far exceeds that of a Aaronic high priest.

Lastly, **Jesus is a better high priest because he is the new mediator between God and man. The former priests had to offer a sacrifice to mediate between God and man.**

Look at verse 3. *For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.*

But **Jesus became a mediator between God and man through his death and resurrection.** Look at verse 6. *But as it is Christ has obtained a ministry that is much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.* To obtain this new ministry, Jesus offered a better sacrifice than previous high priests. He offered his perfect life to pay the penalty for our sin. This sacrifice allowed him to obtain the ministry to serve as our final high priest, but also to serve as mediator of a new covenant.

Now remember the role of a priest. A priest represents people before God. But a priest teaches people the expectations of God. Let me put it another way. A priest teaches

the people what it looks like to live a good life according to God. Recall how God sets before Israel two paths. If Israel chooses to obey, then it will experience blessing. If Israel chooses to disobey, then it will experience curse. A priest reminds Israel of the choices, but he also encourages Israel to choose to live the good life of obedience.

Nowadays, we have plenty of people attempting to teach us what the good life is. They range from social media influencers. Gurus. Religious leaders. They attempt to show you how to live a good life. Lose weight. Control your diet. Reign in your debt. Find inner peace. They attempt to teach you the steps on how to pursue a good life. But they cannot accomplish a good life on your behalf. **Every self-help guru or religious leader can show you how to live a good life, but only Christ has achieved a good life on your behalf.** He not only shows you how to live a good life, but because of his death and resurrection his good life has been credited to you. Not only do you inherit his good life, but Christ as your high priest asks God's regularly to help you live that good life in the present.

Instead of looking for a new fad to find inner peace. Instead of searching for some new get rich scheme. Instead of attempting to find a new productivity method to get more work done. **Continue looking to Christ for help. Seek out his aid.** How do we do this? We pray. Pray to God to ask him to provide us peace in Christ. Pray to God to forgive us for wanting more and experience contentment. Pray to God to supply you with grace to let go of things that are undone in your day. We know that we can go to God with these requests because of Christ as our high priest. When we ask things in his name, we know that God hears our prayers.

The new covenant is better because we have a better high priest. Let's move on to the second reason the new covenant is better. A second explanation why the new covenant is superior to the old.

The new covenant is better because we have a better promise. This new agreement between God and us through Christ means we have a better pledge. A better vow. A better guarantee. **The new covenant is better because we have a better promise.**

The author of Hebrews describes the new covenant promise in this text. **He explains that the new covenant promises to transform us.** By partaking in the new covenant in Christ, we will experience change. To show us this, he cites the prophet, Jeremiah. In this citation of Jeremiah, he highlights two things.

First, **the old covenant failed to change the heart of Israel so that it could keep the covenant.** Look at verse 8. *For he finds fault with them when he says: Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.*

The text recalls how God delivered Israel from Egypt. He gave them the Mosaic Law. He explained to them blessing of obedience and the consequence of disobedience. But instead of choosing obedience, they chose to disobey. Shortly after they entered the promise land, Israel engaged in idolatry. They adopted the immoral sexual practices of their neighbors. The consequence? God allowed Israel's neighbors to oppress them. When

Israel cried out, God raised up judges. But after the judge died, Israel returned to their ways of disobedience. Even when God gives them a king, the kings failed to follow God. Saul refused to obey God. David committed adultery. Solomon worshipped foreign gods. The kingdom of Israel eventually split in two. The kings of the northern Israel continued the practice of worshipping foreign gods. The kings of the southern kingdom of Israel did slightly better. Some kings followed God. But others did not. Israel's failure to uphold the covenant eventually resulted in the expulsion of Israel from the land. Assyria conquered the north. Babylon later conquered the south.

The history of Israel demonstrates that the covenant failed to produce a heart within the people of Israel to follow God. Instead, the covenant. The Mosaic law incited Israel to sin. To disobey. To defy God.

If we think about it, then we find it's true also in our lives. If we see a sign that says: "Don't step on grass", then what do you want to do? Step on the grass. If we see a sign a sign please do not touch, then what do you want to do? Touch. Some of us hear a rule and think: What can do to get around following this rule? Rules don't change our hearts, so that we desire to obey the law. Instead, the law incites our sinful desire to break the law. We need a transformation deeper than what rules can accomplish.

This brings us to the second part of Jeremiah's prophecy. Jeremiah anticipated when God would establish a new covenant with Israel that would transform them.

This new covenant would bring about three types of transformation. First, **the new covenant would enable Israel to internalize the law.** Look at verse 10. *For this is the*

covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Under the new covenant, God will enable us to remember the law at the right moment. He will cause us to think about God's will when we feel tempted to disobey. We discover in other biblical texts, that God enables us to internalize the law through the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us when we lack the ability to carry out the will of God.

The first transformation we experience under the new covenant is the internalization of the law. Let's look at the second transformation. **The new covenant would enable Israel to know God.** Look at verse 11. *And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

This about this. The old covenant was made to Israel. Israel consisted of a mixed community. By mixed, I mean that believers and nonbelievers comprised the nation of Israel. But the new covenant community consists only of believers. The new community consists of people from different backgrounds. Jew. Gentile. American. Chinese. Mexican. Thai. Ethiopian. People can come from different vocational backgrounds. Doctors. Engineers. Teachers. Plumbers. HVAC technicians. But the knowledge of God connects us.

Second transformation we experience. The new covenant enables us to know God. Let's look at the last transformation that we experience. **The new covenant would enable**

Israel to experience the forgiveness of sin. Look at verse 12. *For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Now the Old Testament already describes God as gracious and merciful to forgive sin. To overlook iniquity. God's gracious and merciful nature doesn't change. So, it shouldn't surprise us that even under the new covenant, one can experience the forgiveness of sins. This means no matter what the sin is. It will be forgiven.

Now this might cause one to ask: Does this mean that we can say we believe in God and continue to sin? No. Absolutely not! Recall the first part of transformation. When you become a new covenant believer, you will develop a newfound desire to do God's will. You will develop a desire to put to death your sinful ways. Hence, it would be wrong to say that one can be a new covenant believer and continue to sin. A new covenant believer by their nature desires to please God.

Today, the only way to relate to God is through the new covenant. **The new covenant replaces the old.** The new has rendered the old obsolete. Look at verse 13. *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

Many of us promise to ourselves or others that we will change. **Although we promise to change, we lack the ability to produce lasting change.** Think about it. You promise to control your temper. On your own strength, you might be able to suppress your frustration and anger. But over time, your ability to control your anger diminishes. You promise to stop contributing to gossip. You know it's wrong. You try to keep your mouth

quiet. But you find yourself eventually unable to contain yourself and you hear yourself contributing to the gossip. We lack the ability on our own to produce lasting change.

This requires us to recognize the benefit of the new covenant. **Acknowledge that only deep transformation comes through the promise of the new covenant.** Under the new covenant, God supplies you help through the Holy Spirit to follow God. He enables you the resources to control your anger. He might provide you accountability. Maybe he'll direct you to a biblical counselor. He might prompt you to call up an elder at church for help. He enables you the resource to cease gossiping. He makes you aware that the conversation is slowly becoming gossip filled. He then gives you the idea: walk away. Remove yourself. Or he could give you the courage to say: "This conversation is unhealthy. Let's change topics." Now let's say you continue to struggle with sin. You continue to grapple with the desires of the flesh. The promise we have in the new covenant is that when Christ returns, we will experience a complete transformation. God will remove sin from our lives. When he does, we will find ourselves desiring to pursue God without any thought of sin.

Now we talked about two reasons the new covenant is better. Let's continue to the last reason that the new covenant is better. Why it is superior to the old?

The new covenant is better because we have a better purification. The new covenant. This new agreement between God and man provides a deep cleaning. A complete purification. A thorough removal of our sin. **The new covenant is better because we have a better purification.**

The author of Hebrews explains that the old covenant rituals failed to purify a person completely. Even if an Israelite underwent ritual cleansing, they would be unable to enter the presence of God.

The author of Hebrews begins his argument with an explanation of the tabernacle set up. The tabernacle contains two sections. The holy place and the most holy place. Listen the description of the items in the holy place in verse 2. *For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence. It is called the Most Holy Place.* God allowed priests to minister in the holy place. They ensured that the lampstand had sufficient oil so that it would be lit. They checked the table to ensure that it had enough bread.

After describing the holy place, the author of Hebrews describes the most holy place. Listen to verse 3. *Behind the second curtain was the second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a gold urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak in detail.* Each of the items within the most holy place serve as a reminder of God's faithfulness. The gold urn of manna reminded Israel of how God provided food for them in the wilderness. Aaron's staff that budded reminded Israel that only those in the lineage of Aaron could serve as high priest. The tablets of the covenant reminded Israel of God's commitment to them and Israel's commitment to God. The most important aspect of the Most Holy place was the mercy seat. God's glory sat on the mercy seat. It represented the presence of God. Only the high priest could enter the

Most Holy Place. He couldn't enter whenever he wanted. God allowed the high priest to enter once a year on the day of atonement. He would spring blood on the mercy seat to atone. To pay for the unconscious sins of Israel.

But the author of Hebrews explains how the work of the high priest failed to purify Israel from sin. Look at verse 8. *By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age. According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

The gifts and sacrifices offered by the priests and high priests failed to purify Israel sufficiently so that all of Israel could enter the presence of God. This is what he means when writes: *gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper.*

What can purify a person sufficiently so they could enter the presence of God? What could provide sufficient cleansing so there no longer needs to be a holy place and the Most Holy Place?

The new covenant! **The author of Hebrews explains that only the new covenant through Christ purifies a person completely.** Look at verse 12. *He (referring to Jesus) entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the*

purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Note again the phrase: *purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.* Jesus through his death and resurrection accomplished for us a complete purification. It didn't just make us clean on the outside. It cleansed us from the inside so that we no longer need to fear consequence for our sin.

The complete purification of the new covenant enables you to enter the presence of God without reservation. Unlike Israel's inability to enter God's presence, we as believers can enter God's presence without fear of being struck dead by his holiness.

Why is this important? It gives you access to a strong, resilient, and unbreakable relationship. God, who knows all your wrongs. Who knows all your shortcomings. Who knows all your failures. He will not turn you away. He will not shun you. Even if the whole world cuts off its relationship with you. Even if someone cuts you down with their words. Even if they chew you out. Even if those bonds of friendship have been broken. God will not forsake you nor forget you. It gives you the ability to be relationally and emotionally resilient.

If we have relationship like this, then why would we settle for the superficial relationships? Why would we settle for followers on Instagram or tic toc? Why would we return to old relationships that pull us back into sinful behavior? Why would we visit old friends that draw us from God?

What we have in this new covenant relationship with God far surpasses anything our old life could offer. It is better than our old ways. Our old sinful practices. **It is better for three reasons. First, we have a better high priest. Second, we have a better promise. Third, we have a better purification.**

Let me close with the lines of a hymn that our college students sung this past Friday. It reminds us to continue following Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back. Let's pray.