

"OUR HOPE: JESUS COMPLETES A NEW CONTRACT"Dr. John Allan
LavenderHebrews 8

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,² a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. ³For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.⁴Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;⁵ who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. ⁷For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.⁸ For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;⁹ not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. ¹⁰For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹¹And they shall not teach every one his fellow citizen, and every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. ¹²For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

¹³When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

When you receive Jesus Christ as Savior, the devil loses you for eternity. As far as life after death is concerned, the issue is settled. You belong to God. Having failed with Plan A, the devil then moves to Plan B. Having lost you for eternity, he seeks to capture you for time.

One of his most effective means of achieving this objective is to infect you with a chronic case of “me-on-my-mind-itis.” This is a dreadful, debilitating disease. Among other things, it causes you to develop an allergy to yourself. Usually it springs from unresolved guilt feelings which the devil cleverly uses to generate a towering sense of self-loathing and a loss of self-love.

By making you feel worthless, he succeeds in making you feel useless. Instead of being turned on for Jesus, you become turned in on yourself. You are neutralized as a vital force for God here on earth, and Satan, who lost you for eternity, succeeds in gaining you for time.

Now God, who made you and knows you far better than you know yourself, is sensitive to your vulnerability in this area. Long before you ever were, He prepared a creative means of handling guilt so you could be free to be the blessing you were meant to be. His plan is called forgiveness.

To grasp the wonder and thoroughness of God’s plan, we need a brief history lesson. About 4,000 years ago, God made a covenant with Abram and his offspring, promising to bless them and use them to be a blessing, on the express condition that they obey Him (Genesis 12:1-3). Through a series of subsequent and quite marvelous events, in which the hand of God is clearly seen, this small tribe of people migrated to Egypt where, in a kind of geographic isolationism, they took on the rough-hewn shape of a nation.

For a period of time they were subjected to the indignities of slavery, but this only strengthened their resolve to be free. At long last, they were released from the yoke of bondage, and they set out on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. During the course of their journey, God gave them certain stabilizing influences. One was the moral law, or Ten Commandments. Another was a

system of sacrifices which they were to offer when guilty of forsaking these Commandments.

Subsequent to the giving of the law, God reiterated His earlier covenant (Genesis 12:1-4; Genesis 15:5), promising to bless the offspring of Abraham if they obeyed Him (Exodus 23:20-30). The

covenant between God and man is different from most contracts worked out by two people who meet on more or less the same level. Two equals can haggle and argue over the terms of the agreement, each trying to make the best possible deal. But, as William Barclay explains, with God and man no such relationship can occur, for man is not and never will be on the same plane as God. “In any relationship between God and man, it is God alone who can take the initiative, and man can only accept or refuse both the offer and the conditions of God. Man cannot argue or bargain with God as he can with other men.”¹

In this particular instance, the people of God agreed to the terms of God. The covenant relationship was entered into. *“Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do! And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient! So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’”* (Exodus 24:3-8).

Here’s the gist of it: God took the initiative and singled out Israel. He promised to bless her so that she might be a blessing. The condition was obedience. The people agreed to this stipulation. A sacrifice was made. The covenant was ratified in blood. The relationship between God and Israel was sealed.

Unfortunately, it didn’t work out as planned. Man proved incapable of keeping the laws and a giant snafu occurred. Each breach of the law created a breach in the relationship. To mend it, God instituted the plan of atonement (Leviticus 16). A whole hierarchy of priests and apparatus of sacrifice were instituted. The idea was that, when the proper sacrifice was made, this poor,

sinful, alienated people could at least receive a temporary sense of hope and healing.

Again, all the bases seemed to be covered. But, unfortunately, another flaw appeared. The blood of animals was inadequate. It could not then, and cannot now, take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). It cannot cleanse the human conscience (9:9). The organized priesthood and ritual of animal sacrifice were unable to accomplish what they were meant to do. They could not maintain the relationship between God and man.

Put simply, the covenant failed. So God interceded again and in the “*fulness of time*” (Galatians 4:4,5), He sent His Son into the world to do what no one and nothing else could do: establish a lasting relationship between the Father and His wayward children.

Aware of the inadequacies of the old covenant, and captivated by the all-eclipsing radiance of Christ, many first-century Jews turned to Jesus. During the early years of their Christian life, buoyed by the euphoric lift of first love, they did not find it too difficult to get by without the aid of temple, priest and visible sacrifice. But, as time passed and their early enthusiasm began to wane, many of these Hebrew Christians began to wonder what to do about the problem of “me-on-my-mind-it-is.”

Even though they had accepted Christ as Saviour, they still had a problem with sin. They still succumbed to temptation. With each moral defeat, Satan, who had lost them for eternity, moved in to capture them for time. Taking the normal guilt mechanism God had put inside them as a protective device, Satan twisted and turned it into a tool with which to torture them with feelings of guilt, remorse, shame, self-loathing and uselessness. By so doing, he effectively neutralized them as a vital force for God on earth.

What were they to do? The Christian faith has no temple. No sacrificial system. No priestly order. How does Christianity propose to deal with the disease of “me-on -my-mind-it-is” when it has no high priest to offer the proper sacrifice in the Holy of Holies?

The writer of Hebrews tells them they are worrying about a problem that doesn't exist: “*Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*”(8:1). He then goes on to make three powerful points. First, a true high priest must have a place in which to minister, and Christ, the Christians high priest, has such a place. Second, a true high priest must have a sacrifice to offer, and Christ, the Christians high priest, has made the best of all sacrifices. Third, a true high priest mediates between God and man on the basis of an agreement or covenant which God has set up, and the Christians high priest does just that.

So much for the history lesson. Before we go on to see what all this has to do with you and Satans Plan B, lets quickly review what we've learned thus far from the book of Hebrews. Chapters 1:1 through 5:10 are devoted to proving Jesus is greater than the prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua and Aaron. The wee section consisting of 5:11 through 6:3 gives us the interpretive key which unlocks this spiritual treasure chest. The first half of chapter 6 and, as we shall learn later, the last half of chapter 10, issue stern warnings against certain deadly dangers which can lead Christians astray. Between these two caution lights is the marvelous parenthesis with which we are now concerned. It consists of chapters 7 through 9, and describes the utterly adequate intercessory ministry of Jesus, the Christians high priest.

Christ Is Gods Provision For Our Failing And Falling.He is the Great Physician who can heal us from “me-on-my-mind-it is.” He is the all-sufficient Savior who can free us to be the blessing we were blessed to be.

In chapter 7, too, as we have already learned, our author proves Christ's priesthood is greater than that of Aaron or Levi. It is by divine appointment, not human ancestry. It is supported by a godly oath which has never been revoked.

In chapter 8, to which we will turn in a moment, he shows Christ's ministry is also greater. It is spiritual and eternal, not earthly and temporary.

In chapter 9:1 through 10:18, the writer of Hebrews shows how Christ’s sacrifice is greater. It was one sacrifice, not many. It was offered once for all, not over and over again!

Our author is attempting to reassure these early Christians, who by tradition and experience have become accustomed to a visible temple, priest and sacrifice, that these Old Testament provisions were provisional. They were temporary forerunners of things to come. They pointed beyond themselves to that which would be final and complete.

To nail down his argument, the writer of Hebrews offers two illustrations. The first illustration has to do with the scene of Christ’s ministry. “*Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'See, He says, 'that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain. But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises'*” (8:4-6).

His line of logic is quite simple. Every high priest officiates in some sanctuary. Christ, the Christians high priest, officiates in the true sanctuary of which the tabernacle in the wilderness was just a copy or reasonable facsimile. We all know, for instance, that long before a house is built, it exists in the mind of the architect. What later appears on a plot of ground somewhere is just a copy, more or less imperfect, of the true house which eye has not seen and human hand can never touch.

The tabernacle in the wilderness was just such a copy, more or less imperfect, of the true sanctuary in heaven. It represented realities, known only to God, which He wanted to reveal, at least in part, to His children. Because Christ, the Christians high priest, operates in the real sanctuary, not a replica of the real, His ministry is superior to that of earthly priests. He deals with pure reality rather than mere ritual or fading replicas.

Does this suggest to you, as it does to me, that we ought to take another look at what we think is real? For the most part, we are committed to things we can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. If our senses confirm their existence, we say they're real. Earth is our true home, we think. Heaven, if it exists at all, is uncertain and vague. There may be life after death, but we had better follow the safe course and eat, drink and be merry for this may be all there is. The Bible in general, and Hebrews in particular, says it's the other way around. If anything is tentative and fragile, it is the world in which we now live.

The Lord Jesus gave us some mighty good advice when He said, “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul;*” that is, your true self (Matthew 10:28). We would be wise to heed His words. We lavish far too much time, attention and money on that which is purely temporary. We overlook the eternal. How sad! God wants to give us the Pearl of Great Price. Yet often we settle for glass beads.

For his second illustration, our author directs our attention from the scene of Christ's ministry to the substance of His ministry which centers around a new contract. It is a truism that a contract is only as good as the character of the people who sign it. We might say, therefore, the old covenant was not worth the rock it was written on. One of the signatories -- man -- was, and is, wholly incapable of keeping his end of the bargain.

This signaled the necessity for something new. Something deeper and more durable than a merely external agreement which was sure to be broken sooner or later.

It is the assertion of the writer of Hebrews; in verses 7-13, that this something new has been

worked out and made available by Christ. It is a new covenant, which is to be in the believers mind and written on his heart. All believers will know God -- know Him intimately -- because of Christ. The new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete, because it had failed.

The old covenant failed because of the frailty of man. It was not the law God found fault with; it was the people. He finds “*fault with them*” (8:8). Actually, the old covenant had been abandoned by both parties. “*For they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them*” (8:9).

There had been a complete breakdown in the apparatus for release from “me-on-my-mind-it.” Prophets who lived under the old covenant recognized this flaw and predicted a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This new covenant would not be written on tablets of stone as was the covenant at Sinai. It would not be dependent upon animal sacrifice. And, most amazing of all, it would not be conditioned by human effort or response. It would entail an entirely new and utterly thrilling relationship, initiated by God, which would make possible what the old covenant could not do.

The old covenant was conditional. Its validity and continuance depended upon mans obedience. “If you will,” God had stipulated in the old agreement. In the new covenant, the word “if” does not occur once. Instead, repeatedly in verses 10 and 12 we have Gods promise, “I will.” “I will make a covenant,” “I will put my laws into their minds,” “I will be their God,” “I will be merciful,” “I will remember their sins no more.”

This is a better covenant, for now God doesn’t ask you to promise Him anything. All He asks is that you believe His promises! That may seem too good to be true, but that’s the nature of the Good News. That’s the source of our hope. Jesus completes a new contract.

To borrow Pauls words, “*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh*” (Romans 8:3). The defect in the old covenant did not lay in the law itself. The

law was good enough. The defect lay in the weakness of “the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

The same would be true of the new covenant if Christ had not fulfilled the conditions for us! You and I are no better, no stronger, no more resistant to temptation than Israel of old. But Jesus paid it all. He has taken our place. In our name, He has fulfilled the essential stipulation of perfect trust and obedience. Thus, God is able to deal with us on these liberal terms, permitting us to share in the blessings and benefits of a better covenant based on better promises.

This takes the pressure off of us. We no longer have to do anything to secure salvation. We merely trust in Him, believing that what God has promised He is able to perform. Our relationship with God is firm and final. It can never be broken. We are saved forevermore. Satan has lost the battle for eternity. So, in an effort to harass us in this life, he moves to Plan B. He uses sin to destroy our fellowship with God. But, if we learn to use the provisions of our faith, we can lick him on that score, too. Thus we beat him both ways! Hallelujah!

What are the practical applications of this for contemporary Christians? I see four: You can be yourself through the power of Jesus. Or youll be a goose egg without God. Youre blessed beyond belief. So you can be turned on instead of turned in.

You Can Be Yourself Through The Power of Jesus The problem with the old arrangement -- the old covenant -- is that the human material with which God had to work just wasnt capable of keeping the law. What was needed was a new nature. This is precisely what Christ provides. When He moves into your life, He installs a new kind of guidance system. It is internal rather than external. Spiritual rather than legal. Under the new covenant, God says, “*I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts*” (8:10).

I was a Christian many years before I discovered this wonderful truth. I took the Christian life seriously. I wanted very much to be like Jesus and continually felt short. I was trying to be Jesus through the power of John Lavender. It just wouldnt work. One day I read where Jesus

explained He could do nothing on His own (John 5:19,30). That hit me like a ton of bricks.

If Christ couldn't do it alone, what hope was there for me? I was really in the soup. Shortly thereafter, I discovered the great principle of, “*Christ in [me], the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). I was never meant to live the Christian life under my own power. I was only meant to permit Christ to live His life through me. So I stopped trying to be Jesus through the power of John Lavender and decided to be John Lavender through the power of Jesus! Things have gone much better ever since.

You can be yourself through the power of Jesus. Among the many gifts God gives you when you turn yourself over to Him is the gift of yourself. Your true self. The self you want and were meant to be. Under the terms of the contract Christ has completed, there are hidden springs of inner spiritual insight and energy which, if you are willing, can propel you down the right path. You can be you through the power of Jesus. But --

You'll Be A Goose Egg Without God The new covenant is not only spiritual; it is personal. Under the terms of this contract, the heavenly Father says, “*I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (8:10).

A little boy who had been listening to the sad state of world affairs as reported on the evening newscast, went to bed and in his nighty-night prayer was heard to say, “Dear God, take care of Mommy and Daddy. And my little sister. And Grandma. And please, dear God, be sure to take care of Yourself, 'cause if anything happens to You, we're sunk!”

The little boy grasped an important truth. When the heavenly Father promises to be your God, He is promising to be your everything. Dr. Richard H. Bube, Professor of Physics at Stanford University, poses an interesting question. If God turned Himself off, what would happen? The good professor is bright enough to know philosophically and theologically such a thing is not possible. He only asks the question to force us to face our true feelings about the significance of God.

He says there are only four possible answers to the question. First, nothing would happen. Those who give that answer indicate they do not believe God exists at all. A second answer is that, while nothing physical would happen, morally there would be a serious breakdown.

People would become less loving and more hateful. Less giving and more greedy. Less social and more egocentric. Those who give this answer indicate they do not see God as having anything to do with the physical order. If He exists at all, it is merely for the sake of moral values.

Third, there would be a gradual disintegration of life. Slowly, but surely, a breakdown in the physical order would occur. Those who give this answer reveal a belief in God as a vague, impersonal life force out there somewhere controlling the physical universe, but wholly unconcerned with man in a personal way.

Or fourth, the whole shebang would stop instantly! Dr. Bube suggests this is the only conceivable answer for people of the Book. To illustrate his point he draws upon an analogy made by Dr. D. M. MacKay of Keele University in England. A story is being acted out on the screen of a television set. The people are loving each other. Hating each other. Fighting each other. Helping each other. When the TV set is turned off, the people don't begin to stop loving each other. They don't gradually stop hating. Or fighting. Or helping each other. There is not a slow disintegration of the action being depicted there. Not at all. The whole story stops immediately, period!

The same is true with God. He is your everything. Without Him there would be no you. If God were to turn Himself off, the whole shebang would come to a grinding halt. Instantly. For He is your everything! Keep that fact on the first row of your mind. “*With God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). He can provide you with the power needed to become what you were meant to be. But apart from Him, you're in trouble.

God cannot turn Himself off. But you can turn Him off! You can block Him out of your life.

You can decide to go it alone. But, the moment you do, you're in difficulty. He is your everything. And, while you can be yourself through the power of Jesus, you'll be a goose egg without God.

You Are Blessed Beyond Belief The new covenant is not only spiritual and personal, its universal: “*For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them*” (8:11). Under the new arrangement which Christ has completed, there is no privileged class of people. God reveals Himself to all of the redeemed. Not just to a select few! Christ and the knowledge of Him become the least common denominator, binding all believers in Christian love.

Nor is there anyone standing between you and God. This knowledge of Him and His will for your life is not vicarious knowledge gained through a preacher. Or priest. Or teacher. It is a personal knowledge. The Lord Himself speaks and reveals Himself to you.

If one great truth shines through the book of Hebrews it is this: Christ has opened a way for everyone to enter into a new and dear relationship with God. Having that relationship, you are blessed beyond belief.

You Can Be Turned On Instead Of Turned In Thus, we come full circle. Satan not only fails with Plan A, losing you for eternity when you meet Jesus at Calvary. He also fails with Plan B, losing you in time when, as a saved sinner, you meet Christ in an honest prayer of confession and repentance.

The new covenant is not only spiritual, personal and universal, it is final. “For I will be merciful to their iniquities. And I will remember their sins no more” (8:12). What incredible good news that is! God never says, “I told you so.” God never flings the past in your face. God never dredges up old mistakes and rehashes old sins. When God forgives, He forgets. Not because He takes sin lightly. He takes it very seriously. It cost Him His Son. But God forgives and forgets because He wants you to be free to be the blessing you were blessed to be.

God knows unresolved guilt is like a toothache. Distracting. Unnerving. Debilitating. It is impossible for you to be cured of “me-on-my-mind-it is” if you’re constantly confronted with the harvest of past sins. That’s why God says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). None. Nada! Absolutely none.

When, as a saved-sinner, you come to Jesus with your sin, confess it, repent of it, receive God’s cleansing from it, it’s over! From that point on, God doesn’t want you to waste five seconds in remorse over it. He wants you to get on with the business of being a blessing. If God doesn’t condemn you, how can you possibly condemn yourself?

Satan would have you see yourself as a dirty, rotten sinner. If you accept his appraisal, you will slip into self-loathing and be utterly useless to the Kingdom. God wants you to see yourself as a dirty, rotten forgiven sinner! And, if you can see yourself in that light, you will be liberated from the disease of “me-on-my-mind-it is.” You will be lifted by the creative power of wholesome self-love to a new operational level. You will become a dynamic force for healing in a broken world.

If you forget everything else I have written, remember this: As a forgiven sinner-saint, you are free to do anything God has in mind for you. You may feel that, because of sin and failure as a Christian, you have forfeited your right to serve the Lord. Don’t you believe it! As a forgiven Christian, you are free to do anything God has in mind for you. Get hold of that great truth. Let that great truth get hold of you. You will never be the same. You’ll be turned on instead of turned in. And when that happens, Satan will be whipped on both fronts, in time and in eternity.

“Clay ship idling on its launching pad vapor leaking from its valves power to soar cancelled by the gravitation of self. “Begin the countdown, Lord! Order all systems go free this tethered craft fill each fuel cell lignite it with Your life then lift it off give it full thrust execute the burns maneuver it into orbit stabilize the gyrations accomplish Your mission.”¹

Beverly Caviness

Notes1. William Barclay, Epistle to the Hebrews (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965),

p. 76.2. Beverly Caviness (Minneapolis, MN: Decision Magazine