

A better Covenant
Hebrews 8:7-13

Matthew 5:27-48

John 13:31-38

Responsive. Psalm 31 1-8

This morning we are going to be going through the last half of Hebrews chapter 8, which when we read it this morning is actually almost entirely made up of quoting Jeremiah 31, so essentially today we will be studying Jeremiah 31. So let us start this morning by reading our passage here in Hebrews, but like most times I want to go back and start at verse 1 and read the chapter in it's entirety, for really it is all one thought which builds up as it goes. Hebrews 8:1

So, for our passage this morning right off the bat its quite obvious that today's main topic is going to be the new covenant, and as we will see, its necessity, along with its superiority to the old and since there is a new covenant what has happened to the old. I know for most of us here this is not new territory, and it something that we as a church have subscribed to for a quite a long time now but it is always good to review, to be reminded of these things of the faith, and in doing so we can rejoice in the beauties of our Lord and Savior, his plan, his love, and his work. This doctrine of the new covenant in all honesty has massive implications, not only how we as Christians live out our lives each and every day, but it also is a system of interpretation of the scriptures. Once the doctrine and ideas of the new covenant are rightly understood it really does open up the bible and sheds new light on many things.

For one I can think of the Story of Melchizedek which we have spent a lot of time on as we have been working through the book of Hebrews here. For instance, chapter 7 verse 12 talking about Melchizedek, in a comparison to the Levitical priesthood says, “ For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.” Which begs the question, what does that mean a change in the law? Imagine trying to understand this verse from an old covenant point of view, how would such verses be handled? Well, as we all know, first off they aren't generally, but if you must talk about a new law, or a new covenant from an old covenant perspective it is understood that it is the same law, and same covenant just under a different administration, that is, I is now under Christ, instead of Moses, and it is now to all believers, the spiritual Israel, as opposed to the physical Israel.

But that understanding raises up a lot of questions if we are to be honest. Such as, what parts of the law apply? Is it only the 10 commandments? What about the temple worship, the sacrifices, the sabbath? See the problem here? It is obvious that much of the old covenant law does not apply to the Christian today, we do not sacrifice animals, we generally don't limit ourselves to a sabbaths day journey as was a requirement under the old covenant, and honestly even the 10 commandments have been replaced by Christ in the sermon on the mount. Much of the problem with this understanding and interpretation of scripture is that we are left to sort of, apply these things in our own way, to modernize, to expound upon and change so that the principles still apply today. Which really then becomes a new list of rules, and regulations, and traditions that we put ourselves under. And everyone seems to have a different understanding. Some believe the old covenant sabbath laws which was actually on Saturday, is now observed on Sunday, and since Sunday is now the sabbath day we must then apply the principles of the law to that day. But heres the deal, everyone has a different idea how to apply that, everyone who believes that they are still under the law, under the old covenant apply these principles differently, and oddly enough you can see the division in the various age groups.

The youth of the church do not observe the sabbath in the same way as the seniors of the church. They don't want to be tied down by archaic, traditions and understandings. So you have this skizm, some in the church believing that you can not do certain things on Sunday, and others that do. See where I am going with this? The problem if one subscribes themselves to the old covenant is that it largely seems to be left up to interpretation of the individual. Which was not the way of the old covenant, if you broke those laws there were many which held the penalty of death. Now I suppose some would argue, that is the change in the law, but I think that is completely missing the point and the purpose of the law. God's law is still operable today, you break his law, you die, much in the same way he told Adam and Eve, the day you eat of this tree you shall surely die. They didn't die that day physically, but rather it is a spiritual death, a curse was put upon mankind, and a veil of separation between God and Man was placed. Mankind's own sin caused a separation from God, and it took God sending his son to die to fix it. I believe that the old covenant law still has purpose, still has meaning, but it is the same as it always was, it did not itself change, it is not being managed by a different administration.

As we see throughout the teaching in the new testament, the law never saved, the law never actually produced righteousness, but instead it condemned, it brought judgment upon all those who are under it. It did not just change from a law of condemnation to a law of grace under the administration of Christ, the law lacks grace, you break the law, you die, you face God's holy judgment. The law is not gracious, it is not merciful, it was a harsh teacher that no man is justified before God, for no man is able to keep the law. Even those of us who are born again, if we are honest....do we keep this law? Even the 10 commandments, how many of us fail much of this every single day? The concept that now we are saved, we are able to keep the law which is how it is understood by our reformed brethren, and our reformed baptist brethren is false. For we can not, even in our state of a renewed heart and mind truly keep this law, and we fail it daily. The law condemns, it brings judgement, And that is just the physical part of it, what about the sermon on the mount where Jesus expounds upon it, bringing it into our very thoughts and intents of the heart. So simply, we can not keep this law, we can not gain righteousness before God by the keeping of the 10 commandments, we fail them daily and in that law there is no hope for those how fail, there is no grace for those who fail, there is only death and condemnation.

But fear not my fellow believers, for all is not lost, in fact we have such a great hope within our savior who took the judgment of the law upon himself in our stead, who being perfect, took the punishment of death, so that we who are imperfect may live. This is not a new dispensation of the covenant, a new management of the law, but rather it is a new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ, and a new law written on our hearts, not on tablets of stone, but upon tablets of flesh. Look at our passage today, keeping in mind what Christ has done for us, "But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." I ask, does this sound like a new administration of the old? Or something different? Verse 7 answers that question. "For if the first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." A second covenant? Which did what? Replace the old? If this is true, then why do we still cling to the old? Why do we still cling to the one in which he found fault and felt that a new one must be established on better promises? WE must understand, the old covenant pointed to Christ, points to the need of a savior, points to the fact that mankind is under a curse and is incapable of being righteousness before God therefore we need a righteousness that is not our own, which is provided in Christ.

We must reject the idea that now that Christ has come he has enabled us to keep the old law, Christ does not point back to Moses, Christ is superior, he supersedes, he fulfilled it, and those of us who are in Christ are no longer condemned by it. In light of verse 6-7 here, how can anyone who reads this think that we must be placed once again under the yoke of the old law, why would we go from that which says here is a better covenant, established on better promises, back to the one which had faults and needed to be replaced? So if that is true, where does that lead us? Without a law? Without a guide? Of course not, we are now under the ministry of a better high priest, and endless, eternal high priest who makes intercession for us in the holy temple in the very presence of God, a new covenant of grace, a new covenant of mercy, established and bound in the law of love. What do I mean, the law of love? Do I need to remind you of our study in Galatians? Paul says that we have liberty in Christ, he warns us that we are free in Christ and that we should not longer be entangled with a yoke of bondage, that is, the old law. Verse 4 of Chapter 5 in Galatians he says, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace." Again I ask, why would we look to this old law to find righteousness? Why would we look to this old law as a rule and guide for our life when with it comes death and condemnation? But, it is not as if we do not have a law in this new covenant, and what is that law? Well Paul answers that in verse 13 and 14 which says. "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." and here it is, the key, "for all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The law of love. It is the love for Christ and his love flowing through us toward not only one another here, but each and every person we encounter.

And if we love, we will not murder, we will not covet, we will not lie, don't you see how this new law accomplishes that which the old could not? For it goes to the heart, and out of a heart which is bound in love with the savior flows love toward one another. This is the rule and guide for the new covenant believer, to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself. We must not concern ourselves with the old law, for it has been replaced one which is far superior, one of grace, one of mercy, and one of love. Now before you think I have gone all crazy, look at our text today, verse 8. "because finding fault with them he says, behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them says the Lord. For this the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people."

It is not as if we are antinomian, we are not a people without law, but rather we have a better law, a new law that is written on our hearts. That is, it has become a part of who we are. It is no longer an external list, an external guide for morality for those of us who are Christ it is a part of who we are, it is written not on tablets of stone as the old law, but upon tablets of flesh, upon our hearts. As I said earlier this law is superior as it goes deeper than the other ever did. The old law focused on outward appearance, but as Jesus made clear on the sermon on the mount, that is never enough for the truth is we are not judged by God merely on our outward behavior but also our thoughts, our desires, our emotions. But there is another difference as to why this law is superior to the old, it is not only actually harder to follow, or rather impossible to follow, even more so than the old law which proved to be impossible to follow. This new law was not just given to us without help, for in the new birth, we now have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the minister and guide of this law of Christ written upon our hearts. In conversations I have had with those who hold to a more old covenantal view, I always ask that if we are still bound by the law of the old covenant, what role does the holy spirit play? It seems to me that if we have such a list to follow, of right and wrong then we really don't need the holy spirit's conviction, yet we have the holy spirit...and guess what, he convicts even when our thought patterns stray, he convicts if we say or do something we ought not. So really, with the ministry of the holy spirit, the reality is that we no longer need that external list to guide us in our life for we have the holy spirit's guide and conviction which operates within this new law written on our hearts. Before Christ, did believers have the indwelling of the holy spirit? No, but now that Christ has come as he said, when he goes he will leave with us a helper. Now that the new covenant in Christ's blood has been established, and a new law written upon our hearts, and we are kept by the ministry of the holy spirit within us, there no longer is a need for the old covenant, for the old law, for this new and greater covenant has made the old obsolete.

And if obsolete, then why do we still think we need it? Before anyone thinks that I am saying that the old law is useless, just as I said a few weeks ago. It is still operable today in the exact same way it was then. To convict, to condemn, to show the world a picture of the righteous requirements of God. But the law doesn't save, the old covenant didn't save, it pointed to a righteousness outside of ourselves, a righteousness that was needed to be accounted toward us for we are incapable. Even as Christians we are incapable of meeting God's perfect and holy standards within this life, but we have Christ's righteousness imputed, laid to our account, given to us, and his shed blood which covers over our sins so that we may be righteous before a holy, and just God. Do you see how important this distinction is? Really the effect that the understanding of this new covenant will have on your life? To be free from the bondage of the law, to be free in Christ, guided by love, not by the judgment of the law, to be given mercy and grace, not punishment. It is Christ in us, which guides us, convicts us, causes us to desire to be more like him, to seek righteousness, to seek holiness, and to seek to love one another.

I want to just take a moment to quote a few verses here, that show the nature of this love, to show that this love of God flowing through us is the operation of the new law written on our hearts. Mathew 5:44-46 which we read this morning "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?"

Luke 6:35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the most high, for he himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."

John 14:21 "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me shall be loved by my father, and I will love him, and will disclose myself to him." and verse 23 "IF anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."

John 15:12-13 This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

2nd Corinthians 9:7 "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

1st John 4:8 "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" also 11 and 12. "beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time, if we love one another God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

There are many many more but I will end on this one, Mark 12:33 “And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.” There it is, plain as day...we are to love as Christ loves, and that is a sacrifice far superior to all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

All of the law is wrapped up in this love, we as christians do, not out of duty, but out of love. IF it is duty, then it is done to seek merit, to gain something...I do x, I gain y. If it is of love, what is gained if anything is of little concern, it is God's love flowing outward from a heart that loves God which drives good works, which drives loving those around you, which drives a sacrificial love in which you may even do things detrimental to yourself in order to help another. To you see how through this new birth, changed heart, the holy spirit's indwelling in this new covenant that it effects every aspect of your life? The law says, don't steal, Christ said don't covet, but those filled with love will do neither. The law says, Do not murder, Christ said, being angry with your brethren without a cause is the same as murder, but a heart filled with love will do neither. The law says, do not commit adultery, Christ said if you even look at a woman in lust you have committed adultery, but a heart and mind focused upon love will do neither.

And it is even the same with tithes and offerings. Do you love the local body of Christ? Do you love the brethren there? Then you should be faithful in giving a portion of what God has given you. This is not a law, but it should be the natural response of anyone who claims the love of God. As 2nd Corinthians said, Let each do as they purpose on their heart...there it is, do you love? Then do not give grudgingly, out of a form of law or duty, but give out of love for God, out of love of the brethren, out of love for the church, and as it says, God loves a cheerful giver. For giving such an offering is an expression, a practice of this love that we are to have as Christians, for through it the body is then able to minister, and to meet the needs of others.

Like wise this love should drive you to gather together and worship together, to encourage and exhort one another. We do not meet together here out of mere tradition, or duty, but because we love to gather, we love to worship and pray, we love the fellowship of the saints, and we love gathering together around the word of God. And it is this love that drives you to witness, to reach those who are lost so that they may also have a hope in Christ, and peace beyond understanding. We christians need to grab a hold of this, to see, and understand God's love toward us, and how it must reflect toward others, and should guide our thoughts, our words, our actions and our lives. It is so much more than mere duty, which in reality seeks an outward righteousness, but rather it is a light that flows outward from a heart reflecting the love of God. IF we are focus on keeping the old law, if we even use it as a guide, a checklist of rights and wrongs, then we have fallen into legalism. And as Charles Leiter says in his book “ The Law of Christ” Those who center their life around following laws rather than God does not really love, or worship God, instead his heart, soul, mind, and strength, his affections, concerns thoughts and energies are all centered on keeping laws, rules and regulations.” Law has replaced love, living out a seemingly holy life by keeping the law, replaces God's mercy and grace toward us fallen sinners. That, is, we do not gain merit or salvation through law keeping, but are only saved by grace and mercy of God

And if we are so focused on law, then we lose the ministry and commandment to love one another. For law is judgmental, we begin to judge one another on the keeping of these laws, our ministry becomes to make disciples who appear to keep these laws, and the focus and teaching upon loving one another can be lost. We can become prideful, we say to ourselves.. well, I maybe a sinner saved by grace but at least I am not as bad as that guy!”

Instead we should have compassion, we should seek to help, to encourage, and to exhort in love. Just as Christ who entered the synagog on the Sabbath healed the man with the withered arm. The legalist is more concerned with keeping the law, as we see with the pharisee's in that story, but Christ, out of love and compassion is concerned about this man, and reaches out in love and heals him. He even asks. "is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?"

So, in closing I hope that in this lesson today you can see how important this issue truly is. The Doctrine of the New Covenant is not a mere continuation of the old, nor is it lawlessness, the new covenant believer no longer needs a list of instructions to guide their life, for they have the indwelling of the holy spirit who ministers God's holy law upon their hearts. If we can fully grasp this, and see how God's love towards us, and therefore by this grace and mercy we to have love, mercy and grace toward others how much different would our lives be? We do because we desire, not because we must. Which brings up the issue, if the desire is not there, then it is safe to assume that God is not there. That is, if you are solely operating under a form of duty or tradition, if I go to church, or give to the church, or help others because I feel some obligation, or duty, or requirement and the desire and love is not there, if the motive is not out of a love toward God and the brethren, The according to the bible, the love of God is no operating in you. Again, 2nd Corinthians 9 applies, "let each do as they purpose in their heart" Is the purpose love? Or is the purpose duty? If it is out of a sense of duty then I implore you to cry out to God, that he breaks through your sense of pride and arrogance and false outward holiness, and that he may give you a heart of flesh, able to love, able to sacrifice, and to become a true disciple of Christ.