



Gospel Highway

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Talks given at Reformed Ministers' Conference 2016, Kuala Lumpur, by Pastor Steve Clevenger of Covenant Reformed Baptist Church, Warrenton, Virginia, USA.

4. Title: The New Covenant (Part 1)

Text – Hebrews 8:6-13

Hebrews 8:6–13 (NKJV)

6 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.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

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—

9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.

10 For this is 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.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

13 In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Introduction: We now look at the Bibles teaching concerning the New Covenant. In our previous messages, we observed forward progression, unity, and continuity in the development of the Divine Covenants. But as

we come to the New Covenant we will notice that there is unity, and continuity, however, there is also discontinuity.

The language used by the writer of Hebrews is that the God will “***make a new covenant***” and it will not be like the Old Covenant. The New will be a better covenant, which is established on better promises.

1. The Better Covenant vv.6
 - a. The Need of a Better Covenant vv.7-9
2. The Better Promises vv.10-13

I. The Better Covenant vv.6

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV)

6 But now He (Jesus) has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a *better covenant*, which was established on *better promises*.

The “*better covenant*” with “*better promises*” are inseparably connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Notice **verse 6** of our text and how it places emphasis on the work or ministry of Jesus as “***Mediator of a better covenant.***” So, Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. A mediator is a legal “go-between” or “arbitrator” who represents the two parties. In this case Jesus the Mediator between man and God.

The Apostle Paul affirms this in 1 Timothy 2:5,

1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)

5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus is critically linked to His mediatorial work.

Hebrews 9:15 (NKJV)

15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Once more, the “*better covenant*” with “*better promises*” are inseparably connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Because of the better priesthood of Jesus, as the One who is endowed with “endless” or “indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16) and His better sacrifice, He has become a surety or guarantee of a better covenant.

Hebrews 7:22 (NKJV)

22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety (guarantee) of a better covenant.

When we speak of Jesus Christ, His Person, His work, and all the spiritual blessings that He has purchased for His people, we are essentially speaking of the Gospel.

John Calvin commenting on this verse wrote, “*The Apostle says now that it was but right that Moses and Aaron should give way to Christ as to one more excellent, because the Gospel is a more excellent covenant than the Law, and also because the death of Christ was a nobler sacrifice than the victims under the Law.*”¹

I would add that the ministry of Christ and the new covenant which has better promises are qualitatively better because they are eternal. The shadows of the Law have given way to their fulfillment, to the reality in Jesus Christ.

¹ Calvin, John, and John Owen. *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. 2010.

In **verse 7** the writer begins to explain why there is a need for a new covenant, and why the new covenant is better than the old.

A. The Need of a Better Covenant vv.7-9

Hebrews 8:7–9 (NKJV)

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

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—

9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.

The Old Covenant, which is the Mosaic Covenant was not faultless. If it were faultless, then there would be no need for a second or new covenant. So what was the problem? The problem was not exactly the covenant itself; the problem was that the people who the covenant was established with were not able to keep the covenant. Notice the statement in verse **8a** **“Because finding fault with them”** or **“but finding fault with the people.”** So, ultimately the problem was the inability of the people to keep the covenant. The people did not continue in God’s covenant, they **“broke”** the covenant according to the words of **Jeremiah 31:32**.

If there was a fault with the Old Covenant, it was that it did not internally give the people hearts to obey God, to keep the covenant, it could not impart new life. John Owen, commenting on this thought wrote,

“If the first covenant had made the church perfect and passed on all the grace and mercy God meant humankind to have, then its wise and holy author would have no reason to establish another covenant. “For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law” (Galatians

3:21). *The first covenant was imperfect and therefore had to be removed.*"²

The Bible teaches a doctrine of man's sinfulness. Apart from saving grace, humanity is corrupt, and his heart is rebellious. Jeremiah described the heart of lost humanity.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

9"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

Our hearts are hostile to God, and left to ourselves we will not submit to His Lordship over us. We cannot in our power transform ourselves. Again Jeremiah declares,

Jeremiah 13:23 (NKJV)

23Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

The Old Covenant did not and could not renew man's fallen heart. The Law could not remove the curse or perfect the heart of fallen mankind. In chapter 7 the writer of Hebrews states this fact.

Hebrews 7:19 (NKJV)

19 *for the law made nothing perfect*; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

² Owen, John. *Hebrews*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998. Print. Crossway Classic Commentaries.

But there was hope for the people of God because God announced through the prophet that there would come a day when He would establish a better covenant, a new covenant that was not like the old covenant established with their fathers. This New Covenant had better promises and would accomplish what the old could not.

II. The Better Promises vv.10-13

Hebrews 8:10–13 (NKJV)

10 For this is 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.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

13 In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

It is God alone who establishes the New Covenant. This is the Divine initiative. Notice the “***I will***” statements of God sprinkled through the passage.

Hebrews 8:10–12 (NKJV)

10 For this is 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.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

12 For ***I will*** be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds ***I will*** remember no more.”

This is God's free and sovereign grace. Men do not bargain with God in a covenant relationship. God establishes the covenant sovereignly, or unilaterally. Again John Owen comments on the new covenant,

*"This **covenant** was a collection and confirmation of all the promises of grace that had been given to the church since the world began. **I will make** emphasizes that it was God alone who could provide a guarantee for this covenant. It underlines God's infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, power, and faithfulness."*³

In **verses 10-13** the blessings of the new covenant are announced. The writer of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah 31:31-34. We have in the following verses the nature and characteristics of the new covenant. The blessings of the new covenant are threefold.

They are:

- 1. The Promise of Regeneration v.10**
- 2. The Promise of a Personal Knowledge of God v.11**
- 3. The Promise of Forgiveness of Sins v.12**

1. The Promise of Regeneration v.10

Hebrews 8:10 (NKJV)

10 For this is 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.

³ Owen, John. *Hebrews*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998. Print. Crossway Classic Commentaries.

That which was lacking under the Old Covenant has been remedied by the inner transformation of the Spirit of God. This is the promise of regeneration. This is the Holy Spirit giving new life. God will put His law in the minds and hearts of His people.

The mind and heart are the place of inward corruption. The Apostle Paul wrote of our depraved nature,

Ephesians 4:18 (NKJV)

18 having ***their understanding darkened***, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, ***because of the blindness of their heart;***

So, it is this inward place of corruption that must be renewed and transformed. The law that was written on tablets of stone at Mount Sinai, will now be written on the hearts of the people. That which was outwardly given will now be inwardly present.

So, what do we mean by spiritual regeneration? A detailed definition of regeneration by Matthew Barret is,

“Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation. Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man’s will to believe. In short, man’s faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man’s faith.”⁶

⁶ Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 127.

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of this inward work of God upon the heart. This is a prophecy concerning the New Covenant.

Ezekiel 11:19–20 (NKJV)

19 Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,

20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

By transforming the mind and heart, the stony heart is removed, that which is contrary to the will of God is overcome. And the giving of a heart of flesh, a new heart, the will and affections are moved to love God, and obey His commandments. There is a removal and a giving in this transformation.

The Apostle described this transformation as a spiritual resurrection.

Ephesians 2:1 (NKJV)

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

And as the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus, described it as a new birth, or birth from above.

John 3:3–8 (NKJV)

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’
8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Now listen closely, the new birth is a work of God by the Spirit through the Word of God. As God’s people, we are to speak the truth of the Gospel to those who are perishing. We are to bring people to an encounter with the living Christ as He is found in the Word of God. As ministers of the Gospel let us boldly proclaim the Word of God. The risen Christ commissioned the Apostle Paul and said to him,

Acts 26:17–18 (NKJV)

17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,
18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

Furthermore, there might some here that have never experienced this radical new birth from above. Jesus said, “*You must be born again*” (John 3:7). If you are not born again, you are not a Christian. To not be a Christian is to be without Christ, and to be without the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is only found in the death of Jesus on the cross. The Bible says,

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

Well, let’s close with the first part of this message with some application.

Application: We are starting to see the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant. What is better about the new when compared to the old?

- 1. The new covenant is made only with those who are born-again by the Holy Spirit. God by His sovereign grace has promised to inwardly transform every covenant member.**

Hebrews 8:10 (NKJV)

10 For this is 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.

There were born-again believers that were members of the old covenant. But there also were unregenerate members of the old covenant. As the Apostle Paul teaches,

Romans 9:6 (NKJV)

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. ***For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,***

Romans 9:11–13 (NKJV)

11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

12 it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.”

13 As it is written, ***“Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”***

The great contrast is that all or every member of the New Covenant has received the blessing of regeneration. Every member has the law of God written in their mind and on their heart. Every member has been born from above. This is one way the new covenant is “not according to the covenant that God made with their fathers.” This blessing is universal

among the new covenant members, and it demonstrates the superiority of the new covenant over the old.

Now this is in contrast to what some might teach about new covenant membership. For instance, paedobaptists, those who baptize the infant children of Christians typically believe that there are members of the new covenant who are not born-again, who do not have the law written on their minds and hearts. However, such a position is contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

The Words of Jesus are quite clear, “*You must be born again.*” (John 3:7)
