

A Better Covenant
Hebrews 8
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- What is an old way of doing things that you still like better than a new way of doing things, such as you don't like cell phones, microwaves, etc.?

BACKGROUND: We're continuing a 4-week look at the book of Hebrews. We're calling the series, "Better," because the book sets out to show that Jesus is better than all the other things that people look to in order to fulfill their needs. Today we're looking at how Jesus offers us a better "covenant."

The writer of Hebrews was addressing a group of Jewish Christians who, although they believed in Jesus, kept wanting to go back to the old Jewish rituals that had been part of their people's history for so long. They felt a sentimental nostalgia for the old way.

TAKE TURNS READING Hebrews 8:3-13, 9:15

1. From 2:17 (see below), what can you tell was the function of a priest?

For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

- a. To understand how to define "covenant," how is the marriage contract like a covenant? (Look below after answering this question.¹)
- b. What are some examples of biblical covenants?²
- c. What are the key components of a covenant and why are they important?³
- d. What is a covenant ratification process or covenant sign? Why is it important?
- e. Why is a covenant between God and us important? Imagine that we didn't have one, what difference would that make?

2. Re-read vv 7-10 and answer the following.

- a. What was wrong with the "old" covenant God made with the people at Mt. Sinai?
- b. Pastor Josh shows the relevance of the OT covenant when he said in his sermon, "The old covenant is humanity's default mode of relating with God. What I mean is, our tendency as humans is to gravitate towards a system of merit, where we barter with God, and we think that God will like us and accept us if we can keep a religious checklist."
- How do you tend toward relying on a system of merit with God?
- c. The above assumes we have by nature a "wandering heart." In Psalm 51:5, David confesses: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Do you believe we have been sinful since birth (concept of original sin)? Why or why not?

¹ The biblical definition of covenant is "an elected relationship of obligation established under divine sanction."

² Adamic, Abrahamic, Noahic, Sinaitic, New, etc.

³ Preamble, Participants, Witnesses, Historical Prologue, Stipulations, Sanctions, Depository/Documentation.

3. Hebrews does reflect a lot about God's holiness.
 - a. What is your first reaction to Josh's statement last Sunday: "[God] is so holy that his presence can't tolerate sinful beings. It's like tissue paper when it hits fire."
 - b. If God is this holy, how does a covenant help?

4. Look at the following two passages:

8:6 But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs (priests) as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

9:15 For this reason [because he offered a better sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself] Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

 - a. So, how is the New Covenant better than the Old?
 - b. How would living by the New Covenant change the way you relate to God?

5. Pastor Josh discussed three benefits of the new covenant that show up in these passages.
 - a. One is what you see in v. 10: "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts." What are the ramifications of God's law not just being external in the Bible, but also being written on our hearts?
 - b. Second, look at v. 10 again: "I will be their God, and they will be my people." What is this verse saying?
 - c. The last benefit Josh points out is that under the new covenant, you are guaranteed to receive an eternal inheritance. Have you ever thought of eternal life being guaranteed?
 - d. Describe your emotional reaction to these three gifts of the New Covenant: God's law written on our hearts, a special and unique relationship with God, and a guarantee of eternal life.

6. In 8:13, the writer tells his readers: "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one **obsolete**; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear."
 - a. What does Jesus provide in the new covenant that makes the old one obsolete?
 - b. Do the following statements reflect the new covenant? If not, why not?
 - i. "I didn't get up early enough to read my Bible today; God is not pleased with me."
 - ii. Or we encounter some difficulty in life, and we think, "God must be punishing me for that sin I committed when I was younger."
 - iii. Or we experience a difficulty, and we think, "This is not fair, I've really tried hard to serve God, he owes me better!"

7. **Share and Pray:** Among our prayer requests, let's pray that we live in the grace of the new covenant, which has been given to us through Jesus' sacrificial death and his continuing priestly intercession for us with the Father.