

The New Covenant in Christ Lasts Forever

Scripture: Hebrews 8: 1-1 (10-13)

Background Scriptures: Jeremiah 31: 31-34

I. Biblical Focus/Introduction:

In Hebrews chapter 8 the writer begins to deal with a great biblical idea – that of a covenant. Ordinarily a covenant is an agreement entered into by two people. It is dependent on conditions on which they mutually agree, and if either should break the condition the covenant become void. It was used in the simplest sense in the Old Testament. For example, it was used when the Gibeonites made a covenant with Joshua (Joshua 9:6) and David’s covenant with Jonathan (1 Samuel 23:18). The distinctive use is to describe the relationship between God and Israel. In the New Testament the word is used to describe the relationship between God and man.

Let’s draw a distinction between the covenant (agreement) in the Old Testament and the covenant (agreement) in the New Testament. In the Old Testament a covenant can be compared to that of a marriage or an agreement between two people on equal terms. The parties are on one level and each can bargain (argue) with the other regarding the terms. However, man is not on equal terms with God. Man cannot argue about the terms of the covenant. All he can do is accept or reject the offer that God makes. The best example of this type of agreement is a will. The condition of the will are not made on equal terms. They are made by one person, the testator, and the other party cannot alter them but can only accept or refuse the inheritance offered.

This is why our relationship with God is described as a will, the terms in which only one person is responsible (God). The relationship is offered to us solely on the initiative and grace of God. Thus, when we use the word covenant, we must always remember that it does not mean that man made an agreement with God on equal terms. It always means that the whole

agreement is with God; the terms are his and man cannot alter them in the slightest.

One last point before getting into the lesson, the ancient covenant, so well-known by the Jews, was the one made with the people after they were given the law. God graciously approached the people of Israel. He offered them a unique relationship to himself; but that relationship was entirely dependent on them keeping of the law. We see the Israelites accepting the conditions (Exodus 24:1-8). The argument of the writer to Hebrews is that the old covenant is done away with and that Jesus brought a new relationship with God.

II. The Lesson: The New Covenant in Christ Lasts Forever

The writer points out that the idea of a new covenant is not something new. It is already there in Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is quoted in full. Further, the very fact that scripture speaks of the new covenant shows that the old was not fully satisfactory. Had it been, a new covenant would never have been needed to be mentioned. Scripture looked to a new covenant and there for itself indicated that the old covenant was not perfect.

This covenant will not only be new, but it will be different in quality and kind. It might be a precise copy of its predecessors, but since it has been made after the others, it is new in time. The covenant that Jesus introduced is new in quality; it is different in quality from the old covenant. Furthermore, the Hebrew writer says the old covenant was obsolete, aging into decay. Thus, the new covenant that Jesus brings is new in quality and completely cancels the old.

How is the new covenant new? Well the new covenant will be new in scope. It is going to include the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Hebrews 8:10). One thousand years before this, in the days of Rehoboam, the kingdom was split apart, into Israel with the ten tribes to the north, and Judah with two tribes to the south. These two groups had never come together again; however, the new covenant is going to unite that which has been divided.

The new covenant will have universality (Hebrews 8:11b). All men would know God from the least to the greatest. That was something quite new. In the ordinary life of the Jews there was a complete separation. On one hand there were the Pharisees and the Orthodox who kept the law. On the other hand there were the contemptuously call the people of the land (Gentiles), who were the ordinary people who did not fully observe the detail of the ceremonial law. They were completely despised. It was forbidden to have any fellowship with them, to marry one's daughter to one of them was worse than throwing her to wild animals. It was forbidden to go on a journey with them; it was even forbidden, as far as it was possible, to have any trade or business dealing with them. To the rigid observers of the law, the ordinary people were beyond pale. But in the new covenant these breaches would no longer exist. All men, wise and simple, great and small would know the Lord. The doors which had been shut, is thrown wide open.

There is another fundamental difference. The old covenant was based on obedience to an external imposed law. The new covenant is to be written on man's heart and mind. Men would obey God not because of the fear of punishment, but because they loved him. They would obey him not because the law compelled them unwillingly to do so, but because the desire to obey him was written on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). This would be a covenant that would greatly reflect God's forgiveness. God said that he would be gracious to their iniquities and would forget their sins. Now it is all God. The new relationship is based entirely on his love. Under the old covenant a man could keep this relationship to God by obeying the law. That is by his own efforts. Now everything is dependent not on man's efforts, but solely on the grace of God. The new covenant puts men into relationship with a God who is still a God of justice, but whose justice has been swallow up in his love. The most tremendous thing about the new covenant is that it makes man's relationship to God no longer dependent on man's obedience but entirely depended on God's love.

What about sacrifices? Jeremiah did not mention the word sacrifice. It would seem that Jeremiah believed that the new age sacrifice would be abolished as irrelevant, but the writher of Hebrews cannot think except in there of the

sacrificial system and in Chapter 9, he will speak to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, who death alone made the new covenant possible for all men.