

CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT

Hebrews 8:1-9:22

Key Verse: 9:15a

“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance....”

In chapter 7 the author testified that Jesus is superior to Levitical priests because he became high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus is perfect high priest forever on the basis of his indestructible life and God’s direct appointment with an oath. Jesus always lives to intercede for us and is able to save completely those who come to God through him. In chapters 8-9 the author emphasizes the superiority of Christ’s high priestly work to that of Levitical priest’s, while in chapter 7 he had emphasized the superiority of Christ’s person. Christ’s high priestly work is based on the new covenant which is sealed in his blood. Jesus became the mediator of a new covenant. Here we need to understand the nature of the new covenant and the blessings and privileges that come from it. Even though we are living in the new covenant era, it is hard to adjust our mindset and lifestyle. We still remain in the old covenant mindset. So we are easily self-righteous, legalistic and judgmental, or we fall into self-condemnation and inferiority, and become frustrated. These are two sides of the same coin, stamped with an old covenant mindset. Those who have an old covenant mindset have no confidence to approach God. We need to fully understand and accept the new covenant which God established with Jesus as mediator. Let’s learn Jesus’ high priestly works and embrace a new covenant mindset and lifestyle so that we may enjoy the blessings and privileges Jesus gives us.

First, Jesus is high priest of a new covenant with better promises (8:1-13).

Verse 1 begins, “**Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest....**” The emphasis is on the words “**We do have.**” It is not, “We might have,” or “We will have,” or “We used to have,” but “**We do have.**” When children have their parents with them, they feel secure and stable. Likewise, we have our high priest Jesus with us always, so we are not fearful and anxious or lonely. Rather, we can have confidence and assurance in any situation. The world we live in is like a desert, void of love and understanding, where our souls get parched. We are vulnerable to all kinds of mischief of the devil and temptation. It is not easy to survive. But because we do have Jesus we can be more than conquerors. Then what kind of high priest is Jesus? Verses 1b-

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2 say, “...who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.” The Levitical high priests always performed their duties in a standing position; there was no chair in the tabernacle. But Jesus can sit down at the right hand of the Majesty, for his mission has been fully accomplished. Now he reigns as king and high priest, sitting on his throne (Zech 6:11-13). Jesus is serving in the heavenly sanctuary, the “**true tabernacle**” set up by the Lord. Here the word “**true**” indicates the reality in contrast to a copy. The “**true tabernacle**” is the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells. It is eternal, indestructible and unshakable. It is very important for us to know that although Jesus is God, he came into the world to save us from the power of sin and death. It is equally important for us to know that after finishing salvation work, Jesus reigns, sitting at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, where he continues to intercede for us and to work out our salvation.

The earthly high priest was appointed to offer gifts of thanksgiving and sacrifices for sin. In the same way, it was necessary for Jesus to have something to offer (3). But Jesus’ offering is not an earthly offering, for he serves in heaven. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there were plenty of priests in the line of Levi who were making those offerings (4). Actually, the earthly priest served at the sanctuary that is merely a copy or shadow of what is in heaven (5a). That is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “**See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain**” (5b; Ex 25:40). The first tabernacle and priesthood were carefully established by God. God gave the high priest honor and dignity by clothing him in beautiful garments made of gold, as well as blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen (Ex 28:1-5.) But the ministry Jesus received is superior to theirs (6a). It is because Jesus serves in the heavenly sanctuary and his ministry is based on the new covenant, which is established on better promises (6b).

In verses 7-13, the author contrasts the first covenant with the new covenant. If there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no need for a new covenant (7). But God found a problem; it was not with the covenant itself, but with the people (8a). Usually, when someone finds fault with others, they criticize and dismiss them. But God is so gracious and merciful. He provided a new covenant with better promises. In verses 8b-9 the author quotes Jeremiah’s prophecy to explain that they needed a new covenant. It was because they did not remain faithful to the covenant. Jeremiah lamented

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in 31:32: “...they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.” A covenant relationship is like a marriage. Marriage was not instituted by man, but by God. It is not a contract, but a holy covenant. When we marry, we take a vow to be faithful to each other, “as long as you both shall live.” So each one should bear the other’s weaknesses and be faithful, overcoming times of hardship and struggle. We can never think of or even imagine breaking the relationship. It is because God joined us together in a covenant relationship. Each person is bound before God to keep this covenant. God described his relationship with Israel like that of a husband and wife. This is a really great blessing. God is the best husband. He is faithful and provides everything and loves and cares for his people. But they abandoned God. Though they broke the covenant, God did not abandon them. Rather, he made a new covenant, understanding human weakness. “**Covenant**” is a key word in the Bible, appearing 284 times in the Old Testament and 33 times in the New Testament. From creation to Adam’s fall and beyond, God has made covenants with mankind, such as the Adamic covenant, Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant, Davidic covenant, and New covenant. These covenants can largely be divided into two types: works and grace. A covenant of works is conditional and hinges on man’s obligation. It is characterized by God’s words, “**You shall...you shall not....**” Perfect obedience leads to life and disobedience, no matter how small, leads to death. On the other hand, a covenant of grace is based solely on God’s faithfulness to keep his promise and stems from his unconditional love for mankind. It is characterized by God’s words, “**I will...I will....**” It is God’s one-sided promise of blessing. Those who simply put their faith in God receive the blessings of the covenant of grace.

In verses 10-12, we can find the nature of the new covenant; it is a covenant of grace. In what sense is the new covenant better than the first covenant? **First, God writes his law on our hearts (10b)**. In the first covenant, God engraved his law on stone tablets with the condition that one must obey it perfectly throughout his lifetime in order to live. To violate even one law one time made one a covenant breaker. For example, to break the Sabbath one time would make one a law breaker who deserved to die. There is no mercy, only justice. This law reveals God’s justice and righteousness. The problem is that no one can keep it. God knows how weak human beings are. So he sent Jesus to suffer and die for our sins. When we simply believe in Jesus, God justifies us and makes us his children. Then he puts his laws in our minds and writes them on our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who gives us desire and power to obey God and bear good fruit.

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Second, God establishes a right and intimate relationship with us (10c). God said, “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” This is God’s purpose in making a new covenant. The root of mankind’s misery has been a broken relationship with God. Though we have a lot of money, fine clothes, human achievements, and eat gourmet food, if we do not have a right relationship with God, we cannot be happy. But through Jesus we can have a right and intimate relationship with God. Not only so, but also God enables us to restore our relationship with other people and even nature. This gives us real peace in our souls (Ro 8:1).

Third, all people know God directly (11). In the Old Testament God limited the revelation of himself to a few people, such as prophets, priests and kings. God did not fully reveal himself to his people, but only partially. But in these last days, through Jesus, God revealed himself fully and universally (1:1-2). Now everyone can know Jesus personally and directly. Knowing Jesus is not knowing information about him, but knowing him personally. He provides life and all resources that we need. It is like a vine and branch relationship.

Fourth, God forgives our wickedness and remembers our sins no more (12). This is the greatest blessing for all who are under the grace of the new covenant. In the first covenant, whenever one committed sin, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they had to offer an animal sacrifice. Then their guilt was assuaged temporarily, but soon came back again; they suffer throughout their lifetime. However, in the new covenant, God forgives all our sins through Jesus and wipes them away completely. He will not remember them again. We are really free from the guilt and power of sin forever. Sometimes we suffer from the memory of past sins. We feel that the sin we committed is too big to be forgiven completely. So we ask forgiveness again and again for the same sins. Even though God forgave all our sins and remembers them no more, we remember them and suffer inwardly. It is because we do not believe God’s forgiveness 100%. Let’s believe that God forgives our sins and remembers them no more. This is God’s promise in the new covenant. By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear (13). We need to throw away our old covenant mentality and enjoy the blessings of the new covenant.

Second, Christ is mediator of a new covenant, sealed with his blood (9:1-22). In chapter 8 the author contrasted the first covenant and the new covenant.

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In chapter 9, he tells how the new covenant functions, and especially how the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences. In verses 1-10, he described the earthly tabernacle and the limitation of the high priest's work in regards to worship. Human beings, made in the image of God, have a deep desire to worship God and have fellowship with him. After Adam's fall, mankind lost this great privilege and became restless wanderers. God, in his great mercy, provided the way for people to come to God and worship him. It was through the earthly tabernacle, which pointed to Jesus Christ (1). Worship is not just a weekly activity; it is meeting the holy and living God to praise and thank him for what he has done for us, and to receive his forgiveness, listen to his life-giving words, and to have fellowship with other believers. The earthly tabernacle was divided into two parts, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, separated by a heavy curtain (3). In the center of the Most Holy Place was the gold-covered ark of the covenant (4). Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover (5a). This was the "mercy seat" where blood was sprinkled and sins forgiven on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:14-16). Each element of the tabernacle had meaning. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now (5b).

Verses 6-10 describe the function of the high priest and its limitation. The priests entered the Holy Place regularly to carry out their ministry (6). But only the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Whenever he entered, he had to offer blood for the forgiveness of sin, both for himself and for the people (7). The Holy Spirit was showing by this that access to God's presence was extremely limited (8). The gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to cleanse the conscience of the worshiper (9). They were merely external regulations that applied until Christ appeared (10).

After explaining the limitations of the first covenant, the author now begins to set forth the superiority of Christ's high priesthood as a mediator of the new covenant. Christ's high priesthood is not linked to the earthly tabernacle, but to the heavenly tabernacle which is greater and perfect (11). He also enters, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood (12a). The result is that he obtained eternal redemption (12b), that is complete and permanent redemption. To the Jewish people, the matter of clean and unclean was very important. It is because, as God is holy, so they must be holy. Those who touched something unclean, such as a corpse, became unclean (Nu 19). If they were not purified from their uncleanness, they had to be cut off from their community. In order to be cleansed they needed to be sprinkled with animal blood and the ashes of a heifer. The result was that they were outwardly clean

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(13). The blood of animals had some effect, but Jesus' blood is powerful beyond compare. Look at verse 14. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." The blood of Christ was the blood of the Son of God. Animals without defects could be offered. Christ himself is holy and unblemished. Animals were unwilling sacrifices. But Jesus willingly offered himself out of love for God and people. The blood of animals was offered according to the law, but the blood of Christ was offered according to the Holy Spirit. The blood of animals was sprinkled on the tabernacle and the people. But the blood of Christ is sprinkled in our minds and hearts, and especially our consciences. Among all earthly creatures, only human beings have a conscience. If we commit sin, our conscience is stained. We feel shame and a sense of condemnation. This is why many people try to hide their faces when they are arrested for crimes. Without a clean conscience no one can serve the living God. There is no earthly means to cleanse our conscience. The only cleansing comes from the blood of Jesus. The primary purpose of Christ's purification is to give us access to God and to enable us to serve the living God. Serving the living God is not a small matter. When we do not know the living God, we will naturally serve all kinds of idols, become miserable, bear bad fruit, and finally go to eternal condemnation. But when we serve the living God, he gives us life and peace and all the blessings to be fruitful and happy forever.

How is this possible? Let's read verse 15. **"For this reason 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."** Here the mediator is important. Without a mediator, we cannot receive the forgiveness of sins. Without a mediator, we cannot have access to God or serve the living God. The mediator must satisfy both parties, God and human beings. Jesus is the unique mediator who can do this. Thank you Jesus, our mediator.

Verses 16-22 explain why Jesus shed his blood. The words translated "will" and "covenant" come from the same Greek work "*diatheke*." A will is a kind of covenant, but not all covenants are wills. Here the author uses the word "will" to emphasize that a will is ratified upon the death of the benefactor. This is the principle God used when he made covenants with his people. The first covenant became valid and active when it was sealed with blood. Likewise, the new covenant is in force now because it was sealed with the blood of Jesus. The

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law required that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (22). The life of a creature is in the blood. Since the wages of sin is death, the only payment that suffices for sin is life blood. Making atonement for one's life requires the shedding of blood (Lev 17:11). Here we learn the power of Christ's blood. Christ's blood sets us free from the burden of sin and from our passion and pride. Christ's blood saves us from the empty way of life handed down to us by our ancestors (1Pe 1:18). Christ's blood cleanses our sin-stained conscience so that we may serve the living God.

In the blood of Jesus we find hope for anyone to come to God and become a new covenant person. Keith Green was such a talented musician and performer that he was signed to a record contract at age 11, youngest ever. He was being groomed to be a teen idol and released records like "How to be your guy," and "Home town girls." Then Donny Osmond came along and stole the spotlight. Keith was forgotten and turned to drugs, eastern mysticism and hippie love. After a bad experience he began to seek God. God's love in Christ broke through the power of sin and set him free. He found life direction to follow Jesus and live as a shepherd for people. He and his wife Melody opened their home to all kinds of people and cared for them with the word of God and by meeting their practical needs. Keith produced music that proclaimed the saving grace of Christ and challenged the hypocrisy and materialism of the American church. Though he went to be with the Lord at a young age, his influence continues to be felt. All young people in America have hope in the blood of Jesus. Let's pray that many may come to Jesus as their mediator and become new covenant people. Let's pray that God may raise a royal priesthood and a holy nation among young American students. Let's throw away our old covenant mentality, trust the power of Christ's blood, and live as new covenant people.