

"THE TWO COVENANTS COMPARED"
Hebrews 9:1-10:39

NIV MEMORY VERSE: Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

How many of you are on Facebook? So are you familiar with "Throw Back Thursday's?" This is where you share a photo of something from your past. Well, here is my Throw Back Thursday photo.... And here is a recent photo with my colleague Gina. I don't think I have changed at all, right?



Do you recall last fall when I shared my thoughts on Transformation? My profession of dental hygiene is facing many changes to what, where, and how we provide services to the public. We are experiencing a professional transformation, and I can say that those changes are not all easy ones. Some days it would feel so comfortable to revert back to the ways we used to practice. And for many of my colleagues these changes, new ways of thinking and doing, are very stressful. In my role with our national association I serve as an ambassador and source of information to our members in California and Arizona of policy changes being made to transform our profession on a national level.

Although we believe these changes will improve our roles in serving the public, these changes are not easy some to accept. But then, accepting change is never easy.

I've been thinking lately about other changes in my world. One is right here at Eastside. I have attended nearly all of the series on "At the Movies". A couple of weeks ago I arrived to church as a latecomer and had to locate a seat in the auditorium in the dark. As I inched my way to the upper level seats, I nearly sat in the lap of a gentleman because I couldn't see where I was going. That was embarrassing. The worship singers leave us standing for so long with songs that most people around me don't know. This is not church like I grew up, it's very different.

I work for a Christian dentist and we play inspirational songs at the office. Last week there were so many old hymns on the play list, and they felt so comfortable and so familiar. Sometimes I wish that church could return to THAT feeling of worship. But the world doesn't spin backwards, it spins forwards.

In the same manner, I wonder if the Hebrew Christians felt that way. This book was written to second generation believers, having been won to Christ by those who had known Jesus during his ministry on earth. They were true believers. They had been persecuted because of their faith, and yet they had faithfully ministered to the needs of others who had suffered. But they were being seduced by teachers of false doctrine, and they were in danger of forgetting the true Word that their first leaders, now dead, had taught them.

The tragic thing about these believers is that they were at a standstill spiritually and in danger of going backward. Some had even forsaken regular worship services and were not making spiritual progress. (None of us are guilty of that, right?) In the Christian life, if you do not go forward, you are going backward. There is no permanent standing still.

"How can you go back into your former religion?", the writer asks them. "Just take time to evaluate what you have in Jesus Christ. He is better than anything you ever had under the law." This is the climate in which Hebrews was written.

These Jewish Christians were probably undergoing fierce persecution, socially and physically, from both Jews and Romans. Christ had not yet returned to establish his kingdom, and the people needed to be reassured that Christianity was true and that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Judaism was not second-rate or easy. Divinely designed, it was the best religion, expressing true worship and devotion to God. The commandments, the rituals, and the prophets described God's promises and revealed the way to forgiveness and salvation. But Christ came, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, conquering sin, shattering all barriers to God, and freely providing eternal life.

This message was difficult for Jews to accept. Although they had sought the Messiah for centuries, they were entrenched in thinking and worshiping in traditional forms. Following Jesus seemed to repudiate their marvelous heritage and their profound Scriptures. With caution and questions they listened to the gospel, but many rejected it and sought to eliminate this "heresy." Those who did accept Jesus as the Messiah often found themselves slipping back into familiar routines, trying to live a hybrid faith.

Hebrews is a masterful document written to Jews who were evaluating Jesus or struggling with their new faith. The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better, Christianity is superior, and Christ is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation.

Hebrews begins by emphasizing that the old (Judaism) and the new (Christianity) are both religions revealed by God. In the doctrinal section that follows, the writer shows how Jesus is superior to their priests. Christianity surpasses Judaism because it has a better covenant (8:1-13), a better sanctuary (9:1-10), and a more sufficient sacrifice for sins (9:11-10:18).

Having established the superiority of Christianity, the writer moves on to the practical implications of following Christ. The readers are exhorted to hold on to their new faith, encourage each other, and look forward to Christ's return (10:19-25). They are warned about the consequences of rejecting Christ's sacrifice (10:26-31) and reminded of the rewards of faithfulness (10:32-39). Then the author explains how to live by faith.

Whatever you are considering as the focus of life, Christ is better. He is the perfect revelation of God, the final and complete sacrifice for sin, the compassionate and understanding mediator, and the ONLY way to eternal life. Don't settle for anything less.

Amen?! I could probably stop right here with this lesson, right? But this week we are charged with comparing the Old and New Covenants, and that we shall do.

The Old and New Covenants:

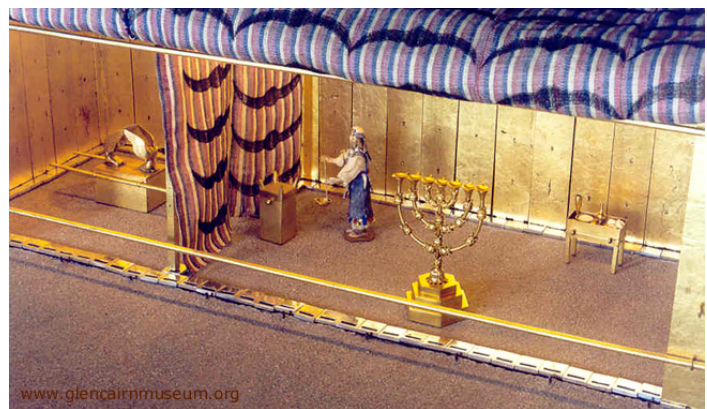
The writer of Hebrews shows the connection between the old Mosaic covenant and the new Messianic covenant. He proves that the old covenant was a shadow of the real Christ. Allow me to borrow a bit from last week from Chapter 8 with this chart.

Reference	Old Covenant under Moses	New Covenant in Christ	Application
8: 3-4	Gifts and sacrifices by those guilty of sin	Self-sacrifice by the guiltless Christ	Christ died for you
8: 5-6, 10-12	Focused on a physical building where one goes to worship	Focuses on the reign of Christ in believers' hearts	God is directly involved in your life

8: 5-6, 10--12	A shadow	A reality	Not temporal, but eternal
8: 6	Limited promises	Limitless promises	We can trust God's promises to us
8: 8-9	Failed agreement by people	Faithful agreement by Christ	Christ has kept the agreement where people couldn't
9: 1	External standards and rule	Internal standards - a new heart	God sees both actions and motives - we are accountable to God, not rules
9: 7	Limited access to God	Unlimited access to God	God is personally available
9: 9-10	Legal cleansing	Personal cleansing	God's cleansing is complete
9: 11-14, 24-28	Continual sacrifice	Conclusive sacrifice	Christ's sacrifice was perfect and final
9: 22	Forgiveness earned	Forgiveness freely given	We have true and complete forgiveness
9: 24-28	Repeated yearly	Completed by Christ's death	Christ's death can be applied to your sin
9: 26	Available to some	Available to all	Available to you

Hebrews 9 - The Superior Sanctuary

The Christian is a citizen of two worlds, the earthly and the heavenly. He must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Because he is a citizen of two worlds, he must learn how to walk by faith in a world that is governed by sight. Like Moses, a believer must see the invisible if he is to overcome the pull of the world.



This principle of faith must apply to our relationship to the heavenly sanctuary. We have never seen this sanctuary. Yet we believe what the Bible tells us about it. We realize that God is not worshipped today in temples made with hands. There is no special place on earth where God dwells. We may call a local church building a "house of God," but

we know that God does not actually live there. The building is dedicated to God and His service, but it is not His dwelling place.

Chapter 9 presents a detailed contrast between the old covenant sanctuary (the tabernacle) and the new covenant heavenly sanctuary where Jesus Christ now ministers. This contrast makes it clear that the new covenant sanctuary is superior. What was it, then, that made the tabernacle inferior? There are five answers to that question.

1. It was an earthly sanctuary.
2. It was a type of something greater.
3. It was inaccessible to the people.
4. It was temporary.
5. Its ministry was external, not internal.

(9:6-7) "When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance."



The high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, or the "inner room," the innermost room of the tabernacle, one day each year to atone for the nation's sins. The Most Holy Place was a small room that contained the Ark of the Covenant (a gold-covered chest containing the original stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, a jar of manna, and Aaron's staff).

The top of the chest served as the "atonement cover" (the altar) on which the blood would be sprinkled by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The Most Holy Place was the most sacred spot on earth for the Jews. Only the high priest could enter - the other priests and the common people were forbidden to come into the room. Their only access to God was through the high priest, who would offer a sacrifice and use the animal's blood to atone first for his own sins and then for the people's sins.

The five deficiencies of the old covenant sanctuary are matched with the five superiorities of the new covenant sanctuary. In every way, the present sanctuary is superior:

1. It is heavenly.
2. Its ministry is effective to deal with sin.
3. Its ministry represents fulfillment.
4. Its ministry is final and complete.
5. The believer's sanctuary is in heaven.

(9:12) "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

Redemption refers to the process of paying the price (ransom) to free a slave. Through his own death, Christ freed us from the slavery of sin forever.

Although you know Christ, you may believe that you have to work hard to make yourself good enough for God. But rules and rituals have never cleansed people's hearts. By Jesus' blood alone:

1. We have our consciences cleansed,
2. We are freed from death's sting and can live to serve God, and
3. We are freed from sin's power.

If you are carrying a load of guilt because you are finding that you can't be good enough for God, take another look at Jesus' death and what it means for you. Christ can heal your conscience and deliver you from the frustration of trying to earn God's favor.

(9:15) "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."

People in Old Testament times were saved through Christ's sacrifice, although that sacrifice had not yet happened. In offering unblemished animal sacrifices, they were anticipating Christ's coming and his death for sin. There was no point in returning to the sacrificial system now that Christ had come and had become the final, perfect sacrifice.

(9:22) "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Why does forgiveness require the shedding of blood? This is no arbitrary decree on the part of a bloodthirsty God, as some have suggested. There is no greater symbol of life than blood; blood keeps us alive. Jesus shed his blood - gave his life - for our sins so that we wouldn't have to experience spiritual death. He gave his own life to pay our penalty for us so that we might live. After shedding his blood for us, Christ rose from the grave and proclaimed victory over sin and death.

All people die physically, but Christ died so that we would not have to die spiritually. We can have wonderful confidence in his saving work for us, doing away with sin - past, present, and future. He has forgiven our past sin -

- When he died on the cross,
- He sacrificed himself once for all (9:26);
- He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us deal with present sin;

- He appears for us now in heaven as our high priest (9:24); and
- He promises to return (9:28) and raise us to eternal life in a world where sin will be banished.

Hebrews 10 - The Superior Sacrifice



Hebrews 10 emphasizes the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in contrast with the imperfect sacrifices that were offered under the old covenant. Our Lord's superior priesthood belongs to a better order, that of Melchizedek and not of Aaron. It functions on the basis of a better covenant, the new covenant, and in a better sanctuary in heaven. But all of this depends on the better sacrifice, which is the theme of this chapter.

The writer presented three benefits that explain why the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is superior to the old covenant sacrifices.

1. Christ's sacrifice takes away sin,
2. Christ's sacrifice need not be repeated, and
3. Christ's sacrifice opens the way to God.

(10:3-4) "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

When people gathered for the offering of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, they were reminded of their sins, and they undoubtedly felt guilty all over again. So the annual day of Atonement did not accomplish "remission of sin" but only the "reminder of sin." What the people needed most was forgiveness - the permanent, powerful, sin-destroying forgiveness we have from Christ. When we confess a sin to him, we need never think of it again. Christ has forgiven us, and the sin no longer exists.

(1 John 1:9) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Animal sacrifices could not take away sins; they provided only a temporary way to deal with sin until Jesus came to deal with sin permanently. How, then, were people forgiven in Old Testament times? Because Old Testament believers were following God's command to offer sacrifices, he graciously forgave them when, by faith, they made their sacrifices. But that practice looked forward to Christ's perfect sacrifice. Christ's way was superior to the Old Testament way because the old way only pointed to what Christ would do to take away sins.

(10:5-7) - "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:
'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,

But a body you prepared for me;
 With burnt offerings and sin offerings
 You were not pleased.
 Then I said, 'Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll -
 I have come to do your will, O God.' "

This quotation is not cited in any other New Testament book. However, it is a central teaching of the Old Testament that God desires obedience and a right heart, not empty compliance to the sacrifice system. The writer of Hebrews applies to Christ the words of the psalmist in Psalm 40:6-8. Christ came to offer his body on the cross for us as a sacrifice that is completely acceptable to God. God's new and living way for us to please him is not by keeping laws or even by abstaining from sin. It is by coming to him in faith to be forgiven, and then following him in loving obedience.

Obedience vs. Sacrifice - God says that many times he doesn't want our gifts and sacrifices when we give them out of ritual or hypocrisy. God wants us first to love and obey him.

1 Samuel 15:22, 23	Obedience is far better than sacrifice.
Psalm 40:6-8	God doesn't want burnt offerings; he wants our lifelong service.
Psalm 51:16-19	God isn't interested in penance; he wants a broken and contrite heart.
Jeremiah 7:21-23	It isn't sacrifices God wants; he desires our obedience and promises that he will be our God and we will be his people.
Hosea 6:6	God doesn't want sacrifices; he wants our loving loyalty. He doesn't want offerings; he wants us to acknowledge him.
Amos 5:21-24	God hates pretense and hypocrisy; he wants to see justice roll on like a river.
Micah 6:6-8	God is not satisfied with offerings; he wants us to be fair and just and merciful, and to walk humbly with him.
Matthew 9:13	God doesn't want sacrifices; he wants us to be merciful.

(10:9-10) "Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Setting aside the first system in order to establish a far better one meant doing away with the system of sacrifices contained in the ceremonial law. It didn't mean eliminating God's moral law (the Ten Commandments). The ceremonial law prepared people for Christ's coming. With Christ's death and resurrection, that system was no longer needed. And through Christ we can fulfill the moral law as we let him live in us.

(10:11,12) "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when the priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

Again the writer contrasted the old covenant high priest with Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. The fact that Jesus sat down after He ascended to the Father is proof that His work was completed. The ministry of the priests in the tabernacle and temple was never done and never different. They offered the same sacrifices day after day. This constant repetition was proof that their sacrifices did not take away sins. What tens of thousands of animal sacrifices could not accomplish, Jesus accomplished with one sacrifice forever!

If the Jewish readers of this book were to return to the old Jewish system, they would be implying that Christ's sacrifice wasn't enough to forgive their sins. Adding anything to his sacrifice or taking anything away from it denies its validity. Any system to gain salvation through good deeds is essentially rejecting the significance of Christ's death and spurning the Holy Spirit's work. Beware of anyone who tells you that Christ's sacrifice still leaves you incomplete or that something else is needed to make you acceptable to God. When we believe in Christ, he makes us completely right with God. Our loving relationship leads us to follow him in willing obedience and service. He is pleased with our service, but we cannot be saved by our good deeds.

(10:13-14) "Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

We have been made perfect, yet we are "being made holy." Through his death and resurrection, Christ, once for all, made his believers perfect in God's sight. At the same time, he is making them holy (progressively cleansed and set apart for his special use) in their daily pilgrimage here. We should not be surprised, ashamed, or shocked that we still need to grow. God is not finished with us. We can encourage this growth process by:

- deliberately applying Scripture to all areas of our lives,
- by accepting the discipline and guidance Christ provides, and
- by giving him control of our desires and goals.

(10:17) "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

The writer concludes his argument with this powerful statement that God will remember our sins no more. Christ forgives completely, so there is no need to confess our past sins repeatedly. As believers, we can be confident that the sins we confess and renounce are forgiven and forgotten.

Moving from argument to instruction, the author cites many examples of those who have demonstrated faith throughout history. Living by faith is far better than merely fulfilling rituals and rules. This can challenge us to grow in faith and to live in obedience to God each day.

We have significant privileges associated with our new life in Christ.

1. We have personal access to God through Christ and can draw near to him without an elaborate system (v. 22).
2. We may grow in faith, overcome doubts and questions, and deepen our relationship with God (v. 23).
3. We may enjoy encouragement from one another (v. 24).
4. We may worship together (v. 25).

(10:26-27) "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

When people deliberately reject Christ's offer of salvation, they reject God's most precious gift. They ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit, the one who communicates to us God's saving love. This warning was given to Jewish Christians who were tempted to reject Christ for Judaism, but it applies to anyone who rejects Christ for another religion or, having understood Christ's atoning work, deliberately turns away from it. The point is that there is no other acceptable sacrifice for sin than the death of Christ on the cross. If someone deliberately rejects the sacrifice of Christ after clearly understanding the gospel teaching about it, then there is no way for that person to be saved, because God has not provided any other name under heaven by which we can be saved. (Acts 4:12)

The believer, who begins to drift from the Word, will soon start to doubt the Word. Soon, he will become dull toward the Word and become "lazy" in his spiritual life. This will result in despising the Word, which is the theme of this exhortation.

The evidence of this "despising" is willful sin. The tense of the verb indicates that Hebrews 10:26 should read, "For if we willfully go on sinning." This exhortation is not dealing with one particular act of sin, rather with an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience. God does not always take the life of a rebellious believer, but he always deals with him. The major theme of Hebrews is "God has spoken - how are you responding to His Word?"

(10:32) "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering."

Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in their Christian faith and conduct when facing persecution and pressure. We don't usually think of suffering as good for us, but it can build our character and our patience. During times of great stress, we may feel God's presence more clearly and find help from Christians we never thought would care. Knowing that Jesus is with us in our suffering and that he will return one day to put an end to all the pain helps us grow in our faith and our relationship with him.

(Romans 5:3-5) "... We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

The writer encourages his readers not to abandon their faith in times of persecution, but to show their endurance that their faith is real. Faith means resting in what Christ has done for us in the past, but it also means trusting him for what he will do for us in the present and in the future. (Romans 8:12-25; Galatians 3:10-13)

(10:37-39) "For in just a very little while,
'He who is coming will come and will not delay.
But my righteous one will live by faith.
And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.'
But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

"For in just a very little while ..." Oh, this phrase brought back memories for me. It's been nearly 40 years since this passage pierced my heart like an arrow of hope. Nearly 40 years since I was a young, single mother struggling in life. My husband of a few years left me with a small child for another woman, our home was in foreclosure, and my whole life was flipped upside down. I had many sleepless nights during that time, mostly crying out to God and reading my Bible. Then I found this verse and it encouraged me.

"For in just a very little while ... He who is coming will come. ... But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

The believer who lives by faith will "go on to perfection". But the believer who lives by sight will "draw back into perdition." What is "perdition" in this context? The Greek word translated "perdition" is used about 20 times in the New Testament and is translated by different words:

- Perish,
- Die,
- Destruction, and
- Waste.

The word can mean eternal judgment, but not in every instance. Warren Wiersbe in his commentary believes that "waste" is the best translation in Hebrews 10:39. A believer who does not walk by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life.

The "saving of the soul" is the opposite of "waste." To walk by faith means to obey God's Word and live for Jesus Christ. We lose our lives for His sake - but in the end we save our lives!

We CAN be confident! As we walk by faith, our Great High Priest will guide us and perfect us!

(Romans 8:18) "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Amen...

Next week ... Dan and "Heroes of Faith"

Visit "Dictationsfromthe spirit.com" for Lessons and Lectures