

Flawless Covenant

Intro:

This is a genuine, antique Red Ryder BB Gun that my great-grandmother gave me when I was about 8 years old. So, let's get it out of the way, let's say it all together, the phrase forever associated with the Red Ryder BB Gun: "You'll shoot your eye out!" As I said, my great-grandmother gave me this BB gun when I was about 8 years old. I was so excited! I would go outside and shoot at things, it was awesome! I had so much fun with it! But, as I grew older, it just didn't cut it anymore. I could actually look down the barrel and see the BB come out like a rainbow.

Then, when I was about 12, my parents bought me a Daisy BB gun that also shot pellets. The Red Ryder was spring powered, but this was air powered! That meant the more you pumped it up the harder it shot! I bought a cool scope to put on it and I was ready to go hunting! Guess what? I didn't want to play with my Red Ryder anymore. It was obsolete. It had been eclipsed by something way better!

You see, when my great-grandmother gave me this Red Ryder BB Gun, she knew it was going to be obsolete one day. I would look pretty silly sitting up in a deer stand with my Red Ryder BB Gun! She knew that one day, it would be replaced by something greater and more powerful, and that this Red Ryder would prepare me, it would lay a foundation for me when I was ready.

In this series "Flawless," we've been studying the book of Hebrews together tracing God's timeless plan of redemption. I don't know about you, but Hebrews is my favorite book of the Bible and for the next 3 weeks, I get to teach on my favorite chapters of my favorite Book of the Bible--chapters 8, 9 & 10. They became my favorite chapters about 5 or 6 years ago.

Maybe you're like me--you grew up in the church and you learned all of the famous Bible stories--Moses and the burning bush, Israel crossing the Red Sea, David & Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, Jesus calming the storm, raising Lazarus, and feeding the 5 thousand. I knew all of these bullet points about the Bible, but it wasn't until later in life that I really began to see the thread that connects all of those stories. It's all about God's timeless plan of redeeming fallen man.

So, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Hebrews 8. If you don't have a Bible...

Read Hebrews 8

The word "covenant" appears 8 times in this passage. We don't hear the word "covenant" in our culture very often, but this was not the case when Hebrews was written. Today, about the only time you hear the word "covenant" is during a wedding ceremony or during a Communion service.

The word "covenant" is used approximately 298 times in the Bible. The first covenant mentioned in the Bible is the covenant God made with Noah, his family and every living thing that He would never again destroy the earth with water. A rainbow is the sign of

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that covenant. God also made a covenant with Abram promising him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and a land for them.

Today, we are going to see how **understanding that the New Covenant makes the Old Covenant obsolete is crucial to us today.**

First, we need to define what the Old Covenant is. It's sometimes called "The Law of Moses" or just "The Law." It starts with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and goes all the way through the book of Leviticus, and it contains all of the conditions Moses and the Israelites had to follow in order to be in a covenant relationship with God. The Old Covenant was preceded by a covenant with Abraham to whom God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and they would have the land of Canaan. Also, in Genesis 17:8, God says to Abraham, "I will be their God." The Law or the Old Covenant was given to Moses as conditions for how the Israelites could enjoy the privilege of Yahweh being their God.

Now, after hearing this description of what the Old Covenant was about, you may be asking yourself, "How is a bunch of laws about animal sacrifices, priestly duties and clean and unclean stuff crucial to me today?" You'll have to stick with me to the end and see if I answer that question sufficiently!

As we have seen in our series "Flawless," the writer of Hebrews has written sort of an apologetics masterpiece proving that Jesus is the promised Messiah to Jewish people scattered throughout the Greco-Roman landscape. Each chapter builds on the previous. Last week, in chapter 7, we learned that Jesus is our high priest, but that He has more in common with the priest king Melchizedek than the Levitical priests descended from Aaron. This week, in chapter 8, we will see that Jesus is the high priest of a better covenant--the New Covenant.

The first truth about the New Covenant we see in this chapter is that **the New Covenant affects the true Holy Place, not just the earthly copy.** We'll talk more about this next week, but verse 2 tells us that Jesus ministers in the holy places in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. Under the Old Covenant, the Levitical high priest would enter the man-made Holy of Holies--verse 5 calls it a "copy and a shadow of the heavenly things"--and offer the blood of an animal as payment for the sins of the Israelites--but only the sins that had already been committed. It didn't cover anything that was yet to come. And, it only covered the descendants of Abraham and those who had converted to Judaism.

With the New Covenant, Jesus entered into Heaven's Holy Place--where God sits on His throne--and offered his own blood as payment for the sins of all mankind--past, present and future.

The second truth we see from this chapter is that **the mediator of the New Covenant is superior to the mediator of the Old.** We talked about this in week 3 of our series. The mediator of the Old Covenant was Moses. He was the one who was constantly interceding to God on behalf of the people of Israel. In fact, when Moses was on Mt.

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Sinai receiving The Law from God, the people built a golden calf and began to worship it. This was just a few days after Moses had given them the Ten Commandments... you know, "...don't make any graven images, don't worship idols..." Exodus 32:9 is where we find the story.

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

But this wasn't some isolated incident! Over and over, Moses found himself interceding to God on behalf of the Israelites when they disobeyed God. He was the mediator between God and His people. But then Moses died, and Israel went through many leadership transitions--judges, prophets, kings.

As we saw last week, under the New Covenant, Jesus is our high priest, our mediator who always lives to intercede for us. He is at the right hand of God the Father interceding on your behalf if you have allowed his sacrifice to pay the price for your sins.

The third truth we see from this chapter about the New Covenant is that **the New Covenant is based on better promises than the Old Covenant**. What are the better promises that the New Covenant is based on? Turn with me 2 Corinthians chapter 3.

Read 2 Corinthians 3

There's so much in this passage, but to summarize it, here is a **little chart** with some comparisons between the Old and New Covenant from 2 Corinthians 3:

Verse 6. The Old Covenant required obedience to every **letter of the law**. There was no wiggle room, no gray area. Everything was black and white. You were either compliant with the law or you were guilty of breaking the law. Verse 6 says that New Covenant is of the Spirit. What does that mean? Hebrews 8 quotes the prophet Jeremiah.

Read Hebrews 8:8b-12

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How does God put his laws on our hearts? John 14:26 says:

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

The **Holy Spirit teaches us** what it means to live according to this New Covenant.

Verse 7. The Law **led to death**. Think about it. You sin, an animal dies. If you commit adultery, you die. No questions asked, no mercy, death. But the New Covenant **brings life!** Because Jesus stepped in and offered himself as a sacrifice, died for our sins and rose again, death is no longer the penalty for sin. For those under this New Covenant, death is the doorway that leads to everlasting life!

Verses 3 & 7. The Old Covenant was **written on tablets of stone** and then placed inside the ark of the covenant. It's kind of like our laws that are passed by a legislative body and written down. They exist but they are in some document stored in Lansing or in Washington, D.C. But the New Covenant is **written on our hearts**. God through His Holy Spirit etches His commands on our hearts. Look back at Hebrews 8:10.

Read Hebrews 8:10-12

This is one of those prophecies that has been fulfilled and yet is still to be fulfilled. Jesus established the New Covenant and God has sent the Holy Spirit. If you are in covenant with Him, the Holy Spirit is writing God's laws on your heart and in your mind. But, we still have to teach our children the things of God. We still have to reach out to our neighbors who don't know the love of God. One day a day will come when Jesus Christ will set up His kingdom and everyone who is a part of His kingdom will know God--from the least to the greatest. And oh how we long for that day!

Back to 2 Corinthians 3:9. The Old Covenant **brought condemnation**. That was the whole point of The Law! If you're driving down an unfamiliar road at 55mph and you see a sign that says "Speed Limit 45," you have just been condemned by the law! You are breaking the law. That was the purpose of The Law--to show us when we break God's law. But that's all The Law could do. In the New Covenant, Jesus fulfilled The Law. He was the only person who lived who never broke God's law. He was perfect and without sin. And because of this fact, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Turn with me to Romans 8.

Read Romans 8:1-4

The New Covenant **brings righteousness** instead of condemnation because Jesus fulfilled The Law.

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Back to 2 Corinthians 3 again. Verses 7-9 & 18. When The Law was given to Moses, his face glowed. I know, that's kind of weird, right? The writer of Hebrews is saying, The Law or the Old Covenant came with glory--it even made Moses' face glow. But it **eventually faded** because it was transitory or temporary, and it brought condemnation and death. But, can you imagine how much more glorious the New Covenant is! It brings life and freedom through the Holy Spirit. In fact, it's **glory is ever-increasing** as the Holy Spirit transforms us more and more into the image of Jesus!

These are the better promises that we receive under the New Covenant!

A fourth truth we see from Hebrews 8 is that **the Old Covenant was intentionally flawed**. Verses 7 says:

“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.”

When God set up the Old Covenant with Israel, it was not designed to be “efficacious.” In other words, it did not produce the result of forgiveness of sins. Only Christ's sacrifice on the cross is “efficacious.” It's not that God tried the Old Covenant and it didn't work quite how He had planned so He had to send Jesus. Revelation 13:8 says,

“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

You might say, “Why would God do that? Why would God make Israel jump through all those religious hoops if He knew it wouldn't take away their sins?” He did it for the same reason that my great-grandmother gave me my Red Ryder BB Gun. He was laying the foundation of what was to come. I believe He did it to show that religion can't save anyone. It never has and it never will. Like my Red Ryder BB Gun, it lacks the power to accomplish anything on its own. It requires something much more powerful to come after it, but it served to lay a foundation for what was to come.

When Jesus came, who did he have the most run-ins with? The Pharisees and other religious leaders. They were the keepers of The Law. They had everything figured out. They were going to try to prove that they could keep The Law and by their human effort please God. How did that work? Jesus called them white-washed tombstones because he never had their hearts and that is what he is after.

Some of you know that I am a substitute school bus driver for Hartland Schools. It's given me an opportunity to rub shoulders with a lot of people who don't attend church. As we have conversations, it usually doesn't take too long for them to find out I'm a pastor. Once they find out I'm not from Michigan and we've only lived here a year and a half, the conversation typically goes, “So, what brought you to Michigan?” And that's when the subject of my “day job” as a pastor typically comes up. Most unchurched people I talked to are really de-churched. Often, they say, “Well, I'm just not much of a religious person.” That's usually when I say something that really confuses them. “Oh,

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yeah? I understand that. I'm not really that much of a religious person, either; and I'm a pastor!" That usually sparks a pretty interesting conversation!

I want you to take a look at a YouTube video. Some of you have probably seen it since it has had over 25 million views on YouTube. It's called "Jesus Is Greater Than Religion."

Show video

Ed Stetzer, President of Lifeway Research, recently interviewed Jefferson Bethke--the guy in this video. He's written a new book called "Jesus Is Greater Than Religion." In the interview, he says that he and his roommates took guesses on how many views the video would get in the first 24 hours. The highest guess was 9,000, but it turned out to be 1.6 million--in the first 24 hours!

Why does this video resonate with so many people? I believe that it shows the desperation that so many people today have and the emptiness they have too often found as a so called "answer" called religion. They have tried religion and found it empty, meaningless. Going to church is not the answer! Being more religious does not bring us closer to God. The purpose of the Old Covenant was to show that religion cannot save you. It cannot forgive your sin. You will never satisfy the requirements of God's Law. Only Jesus through entering into the New Covenant can make you right with God. Millions of people attend religious services every weekend, but their heart isn't in it. God's Spirit is not writing His laws on their hearts. As a result, their heart is far from God and His kingdom purposes. How else can you explain the ever-widening gap between what our culture accepts as right and wrong versus what God's Word says?

But, even those of us who are under the New Covenant seem to get pulled back under The Law. We measure our spirituality by some arbitrary list of external behaviors--things we do or, more often, things we don't do. We judge other people based on our list and we don't teach people to live by the Holy Spirit. We don't trust the Holy Spirit to lead people into all truth, to write God's laws on their hearts.

As we enter into reflection, I have several questions I would like you to consider. First, **are you living under the reality of the New Covenant or the Old?** Have you asked for the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross to be applied to cover your sin debt? Or are you still living under the Old Covenant--under the demands of some religious system that is based on your performance?

Second, **are you experiencing the freedom that comes from life led by the Spirit?** Freedom from the power of sin in your life. Freedom from the condemnation that comes from living under The Law. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says,

"Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom."

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Without the Spirit, we will revert to living under The Law. We will default to a performance based religious system that says if I just do more, God will love me, God will be pleased with me. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Third, **is the Holy Spirit transforming you into the image of Christ?** As you look at your life, are you more like Jesus than you were last year? last month? yesterday? Do you love the kinds of things that He loves? Have your values changed? Are you more able to withstand temptation than you were before? Galatians 5:16 says,

“Walk in the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Life lived under the New Covenant is a life that is constantly being transformed by the Holy Spirit as He writes God’s laws on our hearts.

Jesus established the New Covenant the night before he was betrayed. In fact, he did so at the celebration of the Passover meal--perhaps one of the most striking of the religious festivals marking Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian oppression. Every aspect of the Passover meal points to Jesus as the Passover Lamb. Our table here is set as if Jesus had just finished the Passover meal with his disciples. If you’ve never experienced a Seder dinner at The Well or any other place else, I encourage you to do so. But, after this very symbolic meal, Jesus took the bread, broke it and said,

“‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

When God made a covenant with people, He would often reaffirm it with them later as a reminder. This morning, I invite you to respond to this teaching in one of two ways:

- 1) If you have never entered into the New Covenant by asking for his sacrifice to be applied to your sin debt, you can do that this morning! As you partake of communion this morning, just tell God something like this, “I want the sacrifice of Jesus to cover my sin. I trust in the work that Jesus did on the cross for my salvation.”
- 2) For those who are already under the New Covenant, communion is a time of remembrance. It’s a time where God reaffirms His covenant with you. As you partake of communion this morning, tell God something like this, “Thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus that covers my sin. Help me to live a life led by the Spirit so I can experience true freedom and be transformed to be more like Jesus.”

Let’s pray.