

The Newness of the New Covenant

Hebrews 13:20-21

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Introduction God's people have always been looking forward. We have always been on the threshold of something more and something greater. Even when we look back, we do so in order to clarify our vision, renew our faith and launch our hope toward all that God has promised us. At the center of this is our Lord Jesus Christ. His work on the cross has made all that we hope for possible. This is because He is the giver, guarantor and goal of the New Covenant.

As we have seen in Exodus 19-20, Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant. He stood between the people and God, speaking for the people and bringing God's Law and Word to them. But he could not bring them life. He could only bring them the Law in stone, the word that kills. But Jesus has brought us something new. He has brought us life, a changed heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell us. He has given us immeasurable newness.

This is what I want us to reflect on together as we gather for the Lord's Table.

The New Covenant for the Lord's People

Hebrews

We are God's New Covenant people. Paul speaks of the ministry of the Word as a new covenant ministry. But nowhere is the New Covenant more highlighted than in the book of Hebrews. There, this new covenant truth is opened for us with all its present saving grace and future bright glories. It is called the new covenant for all of its "newnesses". The New Covenant is also held up as so much better. What God has done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the mediator of the new covenant not only saves us, but also sustains frail souls and faltering hearts in the midst of enormous suffering, trials and persecutions. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says:

Drawing Near through a Better Hope

Hebrews 7:18-26.

¹⁸ On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'are a priest forever.'" ²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

The New Covenant introduces a better hope, a better assurance of all the good that God has promised us. It does so because the promises are now guaranteed through an oath made by our High Priest who will never die and thus ever lives to see to it that our promises are ours. The old Mosaic covenant was set aside and the new installed so that we will have confidence to draw near. Since this is the case, it is exactly right, it is totally fitting, that we have Jesus as our High Priest. He is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens. He then is all that we have been made in Him and the we are becoming as we are transformed in this life.

Present Realities through Better Promises

Hebrews 8:1-13

Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven.² There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

³ And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too.⁴ If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law.⁵ They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."

⁶ But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

⁷ If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it.⁸ But when God found fault with the people, he said:

"The day is coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.⁹ This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says the LORD.¹⁰ But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

¹¹ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already.¹² And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."¹³ When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear. [New Living Translation]

Our grand present privileges have begun in the New Covenant because in it are contained such better promises. I chose the New Living Translation here because it so well captures the argument being made. The Old Covenant was obsolete and fading away at the time of the writing of Hebrews. It is now completely gone, forever. What the Old Covenant was unable to bring, what it was unable to provide, Christ has brought us as the far superior priest. He mediates for us a far better covenant. That covenant is full of

far better promises. Those promises include an inheritance with Christ, the writing of the Word on our hearts, the giving of the Holy Spirit to indwell, and all who are in the covenant are true believers. This is what Jesus has brought us. These are our great privileges. Your entrance into them and experience of them is through believing the promises. It is through faith in the God who makes such better promises.

Glorious Inheritance through a Better Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:15-28

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. [ESV]

The Old Covenant items were copies, shadows, cardboard models of the great, solid, spiritual realities God has brought into existence for His people. These were brought to us through the shedding of blood. The old was sanctified by the sprinkled blood of bulls and goats. The new is secured by the shed and sprinkled blood of our forever priest, the Lord Jesus. But the fullness of what has been secured for us we still await in the future. Then, Jesus will appear to deliver, to save all who are eagerly awaiting His coming. This sense of anticipation marks God's people. We are not trying to bring about a reformation of our world. We are living in the unfolding reality of the next world as it has intruded into ours at the resurrection. We are not just looking for promises, but for a person. We are eagerly leaning forward towards eternity where the Lord will one day appear over the horizon of time. Then, O then, what we are certain is ours, what we have longed for over so many years, will come at the hand and in the presence of our great King.

Greater Accountability because of Better Privileges Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. [ESV]

²⁶ Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. ²⁷ There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. ²⁸ For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to us. ³⁰ For we know the one who said, "I will take revenge. I will pay them back." He also said, "The LORD will judge his own people." ³¹ It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. [New Living Translation]

The New Covenant brings us into greater accountability because of its better privileges. If death was the punishment for disobeying, or setting aside the covenant, under the Old Covenant, then how much more will we stand accountable to God for deliberate sin against Him under the New Covenant. Dire warnings like this in this text are designed to cause us to hold fast in faith and obey God in love. So with greater promises and grander privileges comes more serious accountability. Even as we come to the Lord's table, let our joy in God be fueled and our love for God be launched as we reflect together as those called to walk with God in the New Covenant.

Well Equipped for Better Pleasing the Lord Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. [ESV]

Hebrews brings this thread to a close by reminding us in the benediction of the book that we have been well equipped by God to be better pleasing to Him. God equips us, His New Covenant people, with everything we need to do His will. He does this by working in us all that is pleasing to Him. We grow together and individually toward maturity along a path of God's provision which He has purposed according to His pleasure. He delights then in our walking with God enabled by the variegated equipping of His Word and Spirit.

The New Covenant at the Lord's Table

Gospels

This brings us then to think about what Jesus says to the disciples at the Last Supper, the Last Passover of the old covenant era and the first Lord's Table of the New Covenant era.

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Luke 2:14-20

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

What we celebrate then is the new covenant in the life of Christ, in His blood. Here is where the eternal covenant is inaugurated. Here is where all things new begin. Jesus at the last supper is literally standing as the Person in both the old and new covenants. He is the fulfiller and keeper and omega of the old covenant. He is the alpha, the beginning, the inaugurator, the pioneer, the guaranter, the bringer and the fullness of the New Covenant.

Through the Purchase of an Outpoured Life

This table and what it means is not free. Your place at it has been purchased at great cost. It has been purchased through the death of our Redeemer. The cup we lift is filled with the fruit of the vine. But that juice has been squeezed and pressed out. It is the outpoured life, the sure death attested to by His outpoured blood that we celebrate. It is in and through this that we have the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was in the Passover, the sacrifice of animals. The New Covenant is in the Passion, the sacrifice of Christ. As we lift the cup together, let us reflect with grateful joy on the sacrifice of our High Priest, our mediator of the New Covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Celebration by the Church

The Lord's Table is for the Lord's people. It is a remembrance of what Christ has done. It is a recognition of what Christ has purchased. It is for all of God's people. This is what it means to recognize the body. It is only for God's people. When Jesus lifted the cup, Judas the Betrayer was gone. Only His true disciples were around that table and shared the bread and the cup. This is what it means to examine ourselves to take of it worthily. Yes, we need to examine ourselves for sin. But we must more carefully examine ourselves for our salvation. As we lift the cup together, let us rejoice with joy that everyone in the New Covenant enjoy the benefits of being united to Christ.

Until the Return of the Lord

The Lord's Table is a small present foretaste of the grand wedding feast at the marriage of the Lamb. We are gathered here to look forward, in anticipation. Better hope, better promises, better privileges, higher responsibilities all because of our better High Priest. Until the Lord returns, we through this act proclaim His death. Each time and every time all the way up till the cup is lifted anew in the consummation, you are preaching. You are declaring the one and only way, the new way, the better way.

From beginning to end, the Bible is headed toward all the newness that was begun a dark night in an upper room with lamp light faces and tender words of gracious love. As the shadows of the old were coming to an end, they were disappearing in the rising brightness streaming from Christ. All the newness wraps itself up in Him. All our blessedness comes through what this bread and this cup picture for us.

Conclusion

As we share in this may our gaze ever be upon Christ. May our hearts ever be set in heaven. May our lives ever be transformed. May our love for each other ever be growing and giving. May Christ be exalted as we, His people, delight in Him together.