

A New and Better Way

Andy Saperstein

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“Never Give Up” Series (Hebrews)

Hebrews 7:26-8:13

OUTLINE

- I. The allure of the old
- II. A new and better way
 - a. A new and better priesthood (7:26-28, 8:6)
 - b. A new and better covenant (8:6)
 - i. The law written in our minds (8:10)
 - ii. The law written in our hearts (8:10)
 - c. New and better promises (8:6)
 - i. The promise of knowing God (8:11)
 - ii. The promise of forgiveness (8:12)

MANUSCRIPT

- Opening greeting
- Pastor Rich, Pastor Charles, Pastor Shane, Pastor

Amanda, Pastor Scott have all contributed to the series

- How much I like old stuff
 - My pen
 - My glasses
 - My briefcase
 - My car
 - My desk and accessories
- Anyone who knows me well, especially my good friends, and not least of whom is our dear Pastor Rich, knows this about me, and often like to amuse themselves regarding just how much I like old things – but we'll let that slide, I won't mention that today.
- But just as a little show and tell – Exhibit A, we'll call it – I thought I'd share a photo of my desk at the church, so that all of you can also share a little chuckle at my expense 😊.

SLIDE



Now the reason I like old stuff around me because it makes me feel rooted and secure, and connected in significant ways with my history, and with history in general, and for the simple reason that I like the way many

old things look, the way they are designed, the things they are made of, and the way they make me feel when they are around.

Now within certain reasonable limits, it is absolutely fine for me to prefer these kinds of old things to their newer counterparts. It is not an obstacle to my faith to prefer old houses over new houses, or old dishes over new dishes, or old furniture and old books over new furniture and new books. As long as I am not spending a ridiculous amount of my time and money and attention on these things, it is no real problem.

Now in similar, but in the end, very different ways, the Jewish believers addressed in the letter to the Hebrews were wrestling with their preference for old things, too. After having gone out on a limb and embraced Jesus, and even after having paid a real price for following him, they were beginning to long for and be tempted to return to

their former ways of relating with God – old ways of life that on some level made them feel safe and secure and connected with their history, too. Much of that old way of living had to do with the entire Jewish religious system, involving the Law, the priesthood, the Temple, the Mosaic Covenant, and the sacrificial system. They were tempted to return to this old system, as Pastor Rich mentioned last week, because their new way of living – their new way with Jesus – really cost them something. It cost them comfort and status and social approval and wealth and employment and possessions, and they were therefore tempted to go back to their old ways of living, their old ways of doing life. In many regards, their new way with Jesus made them feel vulnerable and exposed, disconnected from certain aspects of their past, and from much that was familiar and predictable. Their new way with Jesus meant that they were often met with shameful disapproval among their own people and culture, as well as from among the broader Roman world

they lived in.

Now much of their old way of living was indeed directly linked to their former religious life, but much of their old way of living also had to do with things other than purely religious things – it had to do with habits of heart and mind, habits in earthly relationships, and habits in relating to the broader world, their social and personal ethics, their public identity, and these old habits exerted pressure and temptation on the Hebrew Christians, as well. It really is the case that both then and now, as regards our way of life before coming to Christ, we often really need to contend with

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I. The allure of the old

Then and now, serious followers of Jesus have always had to face the fact that they will regularly feel a draw to downplay, to dilute, to distance themselves from their association of Jesus in order to make their lives easier in this present world. Those who have gone before us have lived in such an age, we today live in such an age, and those who come after us will also continue to face the temptation to downplay, dilute, and distance themselves from association with Jesus because it will make their lives easier to do so.

“All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” Paul tells Timothy. “In this world you will have tribulation,” Jesus tells his disciples.

The Hebrew Christians were sorely tempted to make their lives easier by returning to their former ways and their former communities, and we, too, will face persistent and even relentless temptation to do the same. The central purpose of this book of Hebrews, however, is to turn the

gaze of the Hebrew Christians it was addressed to, and to turn our gaze today, away from the old things they and we are tempted to return to, religious and otherwise, and back to the far more excellent way, to the great High Priest, the author and perfecter of their faith and ours, Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews is a relentlessly Christ-centered book that is committed to keeping the Hebrew Christians, and to keeping us, in the center of the road that I am calling today in this talk, "A New and Better Way." Let's pray.

SLIDE

II. A new and better way

OPENING PRAYER

Now there is more than one way that we can be drawn back into our former ways, or drawn into the broader culture that we find ourselves surrounded by. We have

come to faith, but after the initial afterglow wears off, in times of stress or sickness, of hunger or fatigue, or when for one reason or another we are having a day or a week or a longer season of difficulty, we find ourselves oddly tempted to reach back into our former ways. John speaks of the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. Jesus, in the parable of the Sower and the Seed refers to the worries of this world, the attraction of riches, and the desire for other things. Like these first-century Jewish Christians, we too are often drawn to our former ways of living.

And I want to pause here to reflect just a bit on the times we live in today. We do not live in an easy time to be a faithful follower of Jesus. (Expand on this here.) Many of the ethical and theological positions that we are constrained as Christians to hold onto are now met with sharp public criticism and even shame.

Now I am not at all wanting for us as followers of Jesus to get into a self-pitying place – oh how hard it is to be a Christian today...woe are we...it's so hard. Self pity is virtually never our friend. But to fail to acknowledge the very real temptations

We are tempted to downplay, or dilute, or distance ourselves from any association with Jesus and his people. Like Peter, there are a growing number of contexts where we too are tempted to say "I do not know him," or "I am not one of those Galileans who follow Jesus," or "You are mistaken. I have nothing to do with him, or with his people."

Now the text we are looking at today continues the extended argument being made, using appeals to both our hearts and our minds, to keep our eyes fixed on the new and better way that Jesus has placed us on. So let's read this text and reflect a bit further on it.

SLIDE(S)

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

¹“Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being. ³Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This 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.”⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.¹⁰ This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.¹¹ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”¹³ By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”

(Hebrews 7:26-8:13 NIV)

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The word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

So chapter 7 ends and chapter 8 begins with a summary of a long section that Rich covered last week – a long section on Melchizedek, the mysterious priest that Abraham encountered after he rescued Lot and his family from some neighboring kings, as recorded in Genesis 14.

Acknowledging that he had just gone into significant detail about Melchizedek, about the qualifications and practices common in the Jewish priesthood, about Jewish genealogy, and other details of Jewish law and Old Testament history, like any good writer or orator, the author of this letter takes some time to summarize – “Now the main point of what we are saying is this,” he begins with, and when a writer or teacher says something like “and here is the main point,” “now the main point is this,” “pay attention to this, because it’s important,” or

“pay attention to this – it will be on the test,” or something along those lines, then it’s probably a good idea for us to pay attention. So how does the author summarize here?

- ⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.
- The tabernacle was merely a copy and shadow of the heavenly tabernacle.
- “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”
- Returning to old legalisms – to a life that revolves around religious duty, and not a living relationship with a living God...
- For the record, legalisms are always an easier way, whether they are old legalisms or new legalisms. They are predictable and controllable, and stays still when we hold onto it – it doesn’t squirm in our grip.

Everything is mapped out. It's more like holding onto a stick and not a salamander.

- The creation of new legalisms – systems of values and behavior and speech that are enforced by the communities that embrace them through the use of shame and mockery.
- But the way that the author of Hebrews is talking about is what he refers to a couple chapters later as “a new and living way” inaugurated by Jesus – a way that he describes using a quotation from Jeremiah chapter 31:

Now the first aspect of this new and living way is:

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a. A new and better priesthood (7:26-28, 8:6)

Now what is so good about this new priesthood, or more specifically, this new priest?

SLIDE(S)

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is **holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.** ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, **he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day,** first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. **He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.** ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed **the Son, who has been made perfect forever.**

[Jesus] has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but **on the basis of the power of an indestructible life** (Hebrews 7:16 NIV)

Rich mentioned last week the ways that the Jewish priesthood was failing. The entire sacrificial system was on its way out. With the destruction of the Temple in AD70, the priestly and sacrificial system came to a complete halt. “What is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear,” the author of Hebrews says in verse 13, and that is precisely what happened.

And the fact that these central dimensions of the old covenant were on its way out simply confirmed the fact that both the early Christians, and we ourselves, are the recipients of:

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b. A new and better covenant (8:6)

Now remember, a covenant is an agreement. And the covenants we are talking about here are agreements that God enters into with human beings.

The old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant – Deuteronomy 11:13-28, and an ancient Near Eastern suzerain/vassal treaty.

- The parties involved
- Their relationship and history
- Stipulations of the treaty
- Blessings and curses

But let's very briefly review the Mosaic Covenant, and compare it with the new. The parties are simple – God and his people, the people of Israel. We don't have time to review their relationship and history, though Moses reviews this as he describes the covenant in Deuteronomy 11. But let's focus on the stipulations – the terms of the

covenant – and on the blessings and curses.

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...if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—¹⁴ then I will send rain on your land... I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle...

If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow...the Lord will drive out all these nations before you...

(Deuteronomy 11:14, 15, 22, 23 NIV)

SLIDE

...if you turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.¹⁷ Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you.

(Deuteronomy 11:16b-17 NIV)

In this covenant, a lot depended on the faithfulness of the people of Israel to hold up their end of the bargain, but the Old Testament is, among other things, a long and detailed story of precisely the ways that the people of Israel completely failed to do so. By the first century they were a subject people with limited rights and little power, and matters were soon to get even worse. They had failed their covenant commitments, and were as a consequence in a really bad place.

The old covenant was on its way out.

Now the argument of Hebrews 8 is similar to Paul's argument in Galatians 3, where he is writing to Galatian Christians who were also tempted to return to their former ways of keeping the Jewish religious law.

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...if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. (Galatians 3:21b NIV)

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²⁴...the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-26 NAS)

²⁴ ...the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith... (Galatians 3:24-26 NIV)

SLIDE



Paul calls the law a tutor, a guardian, a temporary guide to us, but never intended to be the final destination. Now what would you think of me if I claimed to want to go to New York City and yet I insisted on pitching my tent at the base of this sign in hopes of arriving there? This highway sign, like the law, like the Old Covenant, exists as a pointer to something or someone that is far better and more important than the sign itself.

But now let's read the passage from Jeremiah that the author of the letter to the Hebrews quotes in chapter 8.

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³¹ "The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the Lord.

³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of
Israel after that time," declares the Lord.
"I will put my law in their minds

and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the Lord.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."
(Jeremiah 31:31-34 NIV)

So what is better about this covenant?

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- i. The law written in our minds (8:10)

In the Old Covenant, we read:

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¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your

foreheads. ¹⁹Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates...

(Deuteronomy 11:18-20 NIV)

SLIDE



But in the New Covenant, we read:

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²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

(John 14:26 NAS)

¹⁵The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶for,

“Who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”^[a]

But we have the mind of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 2:15-16 NIV)

In the New Covenant, we also experience:

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ii. The law written in our hearts (8:10)

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...but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5 NIV)

- A few words about engaging in a living, moment-by-moment relationship with God using both our hearts and our minds (and our souls and our strength), and how this looks fundamentally different than mere religious observance.

And beyond this, this new and better covenant contains

SLIDE

- a. New and better promises (8:6)

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- i. The promise of knowing God (8:11)

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- ii. The promise of forgiveness (8:12)

SLIDE

¹⁰This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

(Hebrews 8:10-11 NIV)