

Series: A New Covenant Primer
Sermon Seven: The Perfection of the New Covenant
Text: Hebrews 9:11-10:18
Speaker: Pastor Dale Evans
Date: November 16, 2014

Introduction:

Thomas Edison was a great inventor and innovator. He was a man with much to say as well. He is the source of many quotes like: "We often miss opportunity because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work" or "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." He also wrote a diatribe like this: "...What I have denied and what my reason compels me to deny, is the existence of a Being enthroned above us as a god, directing our mundane affairs in detail, regarding us as individuals, punishing us, rewarding us as human judges might. When the churches learn to take [a] rational view of things, when they become true schools of ethics and stop teaching fables, they will be more effective than they are today... If they would turn all that ability to teaching this one thing – the fact that honesty is best, that selfishness and lies of any sort must surely fail to produce happiness – they would accomplish actual things. Religious faiths and creeds have greatly hampered our development. They have absorbed and wasted some fine intellects. That creeds are getting to be less and less important to the average mind with every passing year is a good sign, I think, although I do not wish to talk about what is commonly called theology." But he also said this: "There is a great directing head of people and things — a Supreme Being who looks after the destinies of the world. I am convinced that the body is made up of entities that are intelligent and are directed by this Higher Power. When one cuts his finger, I believe it is the intelligence of these entities which heals the wound." So, he wasn't always so clear as to what he was thinking.

It has been reported that Thomas Edison had this to say regarding his "invention" of the incandescent bulb, in particular with respect to the development of the filament. Although the actual statement may be apocryphal he said: "The electric light has caused me the greatest amount of study and has required the most elaborate experiments.... Although I was never myself discouraged or hopeless of its success, I cannot say the same for my associates.... Through all of the years of experimenting with it, I never once made an associated discovery. It was deductive... The results I achieved were the consequence of invention - pure and simple. I would construct and work along various lines until I found them untenable. When one theory was discarded, I developed another at once. I realized very early that this was the only possible way for me to work out all the problems...Results? Why, man, I have gotten lots of results! If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is often a step forward..." often summarized as "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

This is NOT what God is doing throughout history and in the storyline of the Bible. Do not read your Bible as a collection of stories portraying a god who is working feverishly in his “earthly laboratory” to concoct a meaningful way of life that will hopefully be successful in eliminating pain, suffering, evil and even sin from human experience. God’s plan, in all its facets, is grand, comprehensive and intentional. Understanding the concept referred to in Scripture as the New Covenant involves a resolve to affirm the purposeful organization of the work of God from creation to new creation and to read the Bible as the unfolding of this story. It focuses our attention to see and understand that the Gospel, the work and revelation of the Son, Jesus Christ, has inaugurated a new, better and (using an adjective we will introduce this morning) perfect way. God in the past has spoken through events, speeches, rituals and law that now find their true and complete meaning in the power of the Gospel. The Old Covenant, the laws, rituals and ceremony given through Moses had a real but symbolic and temporary purpose that is now more clearly seen in light of the coming of the Gospel. The Old Covenant cannot and was never intended to “bring or keep” one in a “right relationship” with God. This relationship has always been in and through faith, which in the past was anticipatory but now has substance that has been made real in the coming of the Son and the sending of the Spirit. Hearts are cleansed and lives empowered in a way only pictured before. The Old Covenant pointed to Jesus...the person of the New Covenant, whose incarnation and violent, sacrificial death on the cross fulfills all the pictures and shadows of the Old Covenant and ratifies the New. Seeing the centrality of the Gospel and the implications that the new covenantal relationship it brings with it will cause us to read our Bibles comprehensively and cohesively, will affect our view of the church and its practices, and will cause us to live daily in light of the power of the gospel.

As we proceed forward, this week we go back again to Hebrews. Reading this larger passage from 9:11-10:18 we want to see two concepts highlighted by a contrast. I told my flock to pray for this sermon because I had written it in my head at least four times. Again what I want to accomplish is not so much an explanation of the details of the text but rather the connections and assumptions that the text holds that should help us see its emphasis and application more clearly.

Text

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered

himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

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.

¹⁰ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' "

⁸ When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away

with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord:

*I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,”*

¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

This extended passage is part of a larger argument that began with a transitional section in 4:14-16 and concludes with another transitional section in 10:19-25. These small units function as bookends by their related phrases of having an “approach to God” and “holding firm” to faith because of the “priestly” work of Jesus (you can look more closely at these two passages at your leisure). Chapters 5-7 speak of this priest’s unique and intentional appointment, chapters 8-10 speak of the nature of this priest’s work.

Contrasts

There is a significant contrast that is highlighted, rephrased and reworked throughout the passage found in comparing verse 1 of chapter 10 with verse 14. Here we see first that the Old Covenant could “never make perfect” in verse 10, and yet later we are told that the New Covenant relationship makes “perfect forever” in verse 14. This contrast is demonstrated in the flow of the argument by phrases like: “greater and more perfect tent” found in verse 11 of chapter 9, “not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood” in verse 12. In chapter 9 and down in verse 24 we see another obvious contrast “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” and continuing on in verses 25 and 26 we see “Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, 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.”

In chapter 10 we immediately see in verse one “since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those

who draw near.” And farther down in verses 11-13, “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.”

These contrasts are there to repeatedly point out the “perfection” of the New Covenant. We are told that it in and of itself can be described as perfect, but perfection is also involved in what it does and means. Reading in chapter 9 we can see the finality expressed in the work of Jesus. Read the main thoughts with me here. In 9:11, *When Christ appeared as a high priest... he entered once for all into the holy places, [to] by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. [To] purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.* The work of Christ, which brings the New Covenant both secured eternal redemption, providing an eternal inheritance but also purifies consciences to serve the living God. We want to see the tight connection that the author of Hebrews makes between these two components of the New Covenant that is “perfect.”

Concepts

Imbedded in the work of this great high priest are both objective and subjective realities. While they cannot be separated in that one is the basis for the other and one will necessarily follow the other, they can be distinguished. They find their connection in the nature of the New Covenant and our position in the Christ who makes and is the New Covenant.

The first concept we see from the text is that of our position before and access to God. Again back to chapter 9: in verse 12 we see the securing of an eternal redemption, in verse 22 we see this purchase is needed because there is sin that must be forgiven. Indeed in verse 26 the end-of-ages work of the Christ is seen because *“he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* This is the meaning behind Jesus words at the Last Supper, this cup is the New Covenant in my blood.” His life and death secured the redemption, forgiveness and “justification” of those who would have faith in Him.

In chapter 10 the two concepts find close proximity to each other. Let’s read from verse 1 to follow closely the argument.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once

been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

*⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
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⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Notice in the “doing of your will” Christ “does away with the first”. Christ was the “covenant keeping Israel” and in so fulfilled the law and then set it aside. He then established “the second” (first referring to Mosaic/Old Covenant and second being the New Covenant). Christ then by the establishment of the New/second Covenant declares that we (those who follow in faith) have been sanctified because of this once-for-all offering. The text declares that we *have been* set apart for his service, cleansed and purified for access, given task and commission to be his secondary image bearers as we reflect the image of the true son. This is all true of those who believe now.

But there is another concept intimately tied to this perfection of the New Covenant that is also here in this text. As far back as 9:14 we read that the work of our high priest was also intended to *purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*. This tells us there is a living and active component to what is occurring. It is not merely or exclusively a positional event that the work of Christ effects; it provides a motive, an empowerment by virtue of a clean conscience to serve God. Our being His image (our ultimate duty and design) can now be accomplished “perfectly” in light of our new position and relationship in the New Covenant.

Beginning in verse 12 of chapter 10 we are getting a better look at this corollary concept. Let’s read beginning there.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

*¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:*

*I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,”*

¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The interesting twist on the phrase that we had read before is now rendered in verse 14 as “those who are being sanctified.” Notice the change in the tense of the verb. It went from those who have been sanctified to those who are being sanctified. Our position because of the New Covenant includes a transformational element as well. There is promise that what is a “heavenly reality” will become more real in our experience. In verses 15-18 we see clearly this connection. This connection is true in our experiences because of the witness of the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant involves both heart and mind change and forgiveness. It is done, complete. But because of the plan that God has to leave us to fill out, to live out an expectation of glory and peace, we find ourselves being reminded to live in faith. This faith is in the work of the Christ and the truth of our forgiveness.

Both Justification and Transformation are embedding in the promise and perfection of the New Covenant.

Reflect and Respond

1. our status...The New Covenant is the basis for our position in Christ. Jesus is the covenant maker and our standing in on his eternal trustworthiness. God the Father will not turn away from the covenant with the Son, and because Christ's own are included in this covenant relationship, we have confidence to draw near.
2. our power...The New Covenant also includes the experiential cleansing and empowerment to serve Him. The promise of the Spirit and the living in light of the Gospel is what calls us to be like Christ now.
3. our hope...The New Covenant is the perfect, final and eternal covenant. Our status and power provide a view of the future, and strength in the turmoil of today.

Hallelujah, What a Savior!