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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The New Covenant and Prophecy, part III”

TRANSCRIPT

Our subject is the continuation of “The New Covenant and Prophecy,” and we are studying the last of the great historical covenants in our series of studies in prophecy and the covenants, and this last of the great historical covenants the New Covenant was announced by the Prophet Jeremiah while he was in the pen, in prison, and while famine and plague raged in the city, and the Babylonian army was battering against the walls of the city of Jerusalem. And in the midst of this midnight hour of Judah’s history, God gave Israel through Jeremiah, “the Book of Consolation,” Jeremiah chapters 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago when we were studying in Jeremiah chapter 31, everything was not saccharinely sweet in the prophecies of the prophets at this critical juncture in Judah’s history. As a matter of fact, what God announced through the prophet was disciplinary judgment. But nevertheless, in spite of the disciplinary judgment that was sure to come, the seed of Israel should abide forever. And if you can remember that far back I tried to point out that the prophet set forth a kind of divine program that included disciplinary exile for the children of Israel as a result of their disobedience, then a time of Jacob’s trouble, the time of Great Tribulation which would fall upon Israel in the countries of the earth to which they had been scattered. He also prophesied that there

would be a restoration from the captivity and that disciplinary judgment, and that God would give to them new covenant blessings.

We looked at Jeremiah chapter 31 and we saw that that New Covenant was an enduring compact. It was inscribed within the heart or would be inscribed within the heart of those who would be involved in that covenant. It was not a fleeting imposition of blessing which was conditional as the Mosaic Covenant, imposed from without, but one from within. And if you can remember as far back as our first study, we emphasized the fact that the New Covenant was a reiteration and expansion and an expansion of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises. We emphasized also, that it was superior to the Mosaic Covenant. We emphasized that it stressed the forgiveness of sins, which was something that the Abrahamic Covenant with its magnificent promises, did not contain. And then we stressed that its goal was the one, essential knowledge for men: communion of God and the knowledge of God in communion with him.

Deliverance from our wandering hearts is the promise of the New Covenant, and when New Covenant blessings ultimately come, then we shall not have to worry about the tendency of our human nature to turn aside from the truth of God, to disobey the word of God, to become indifferent to the promises of God, to decline in our spiritual life, to depart from the responsibilities that are set forth for us in the word of God. And if that doesn’t thrill you to some extent, then I don’t know whether you have much experience of living in the light of the Scriptures given us by inspiration.

We emphasized also finally that this covenant was, as the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, a covenant of grace. That throughout that covenant you can find over and over again the words: I will, I will. I will make a new covenant. I will give forgiveness of sins. I will put my law in your hearts and so forth. This covenant is the unconditional covenant that is guaranteed by the faithfulness of God and it shall be fulfilled.

Then in our second study of the New Covenant, we turned to the New Testament, and we looked at the institution of the Lord’s Supper in which the Lord Jesus related his

cross work to the ratification of the New Covenant. In Matthew chapter 26 and verse 28, at the last Passover and the first Lord’s supper the Lord Jesus took the cup he gave thanks he gave it to them and he said, drink ya’ll, of it, and then these important words, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Now that statement, this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins, is the important statement in which our Lord relates his suffering on Calvary to the ratification of the New Covenant of the Old Testament. Now of course he does not say that this New Covenant is the New Covenant of Jeremiah. He doesn’t have to say it because his audience was not filled with *Dummkopfen* -- dummies -- who need these simple things to be explained to them.

So I will say to you that it is obvious that since in the Old Testament we have New Covenant in Jeremiah chapter 31, and we have our Lord Jesus saying this is my blood of the New Covenant, since he is speaking to Israelites who know the Scriptures, who know the terms of Scripture it is unnecessary for him to explain this is the New Covenant of Jeremiah chapter 31 for all who knew anything about the Scriptures would know that. They would know because that term has been defined by its usage down through the centuries. So there is no need for him to stop and say, Now I’m talking about the same New Covenant that is found in Jeremiah chapter 31.

Now the Lord Jesus says, this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins. It is then in our Lord’s saving work on the cross at Calvary -- of course the blood refers to that as history shows -- it is by the shedding of the blood upon the cross at Calvary that the New Covenant of the Old Testament is ratified and inaugurated. In other words, it is by virtue of the suffering of the Messiah that the promises have now become available for all who are included within the New Covenant and its promises.

Now of course there are other New Testament passages that refer to the New Covenant. What do they say? And that’s what we want to look at now as we turn to our

second passage, our second section really, the Epistle to the Hebrews and then next, the Lord-willing, we want to conclude our study of the New Covenant by turning to Romans chapter 11 and dealing with the light that that chapter has to throw upon the New Covenant.

We want to look at the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the first passage that we want to look at is Hebrews chapter 8 verse 1 through verse 13, and we’ll use this passage as our Scripture reading: Hebrews chapter 8 verse 1 through verse 13. Donald Gray Barnhouse used to love to say when he taught the Epistle to the Hebrews that “The Book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to teach the Hebrews that they should no longer be Hebrews.” [Laughter] Now that always made a great deal of impression upon me and I think essentially that that is exactly why this book was written. It was written to Hebrew Christians who were in danger of turning aside from the new revelation in Jesus Christ, from the teaching that they had obtained, that the Lord Jesus fulfilled in his ministry, the Levitical *cultus* of the Old Testament.

Not only that but he also fulfilled in his ministry the Messianic promises, and he fulfilled all of the things that pointed forward to the Messianic office. So the Book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrew, Hebrew professing Christians, to teach these Hebrew professing Christians that they should no longer be simply Hebrews; that is to turn back to Judaism. For in turning back to Judaism, they were really turning away from that to which true Judaism pointed, the fulfillment ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Now will you listen as we read beginning at verse 1?

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: (now that word sum to us means of course the summary; the Greek word however means the chief point; so let’s read it that way)

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the chief point (as a matter of fact the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does

not really say, Now of the things which we have spoken. If you have a version which is a modern version you probably notice that the word spoken is really in the present tense and it is in the present tense in the Greek text. So let’s read it that way.) Now of the things which are being spoken, this is the chief point (I think we could say really this is the chief point of the epistle; that’s what he’s saying. I’m trying to get over this major point. What is it?) We have such an high priest who is seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. (He’s not the Levitical high priest. He is the Melchizedekian high priest who is a high priest of a different order, an eternal priest not a temporal priest) For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, (he was not of the Levitical line) seeing that they there are priests that offer gifts according to the law (the Levitical priests☺ Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown thee in the mount. (In other words, the Levitical priests ministered in a tabernacle and ministered services that were examples and shadows of the heavenly things with our Lord in his ministry has brought into reality.) But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better

promises. (Now we shall see that this better covenant is the New Covenant of Jeremiah, for he will now cite that particular passage.) For if that first covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (the Mosaic Covenant); because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and groweth old is ready to vanish away.”

Bible students have often said -- I think at least I've often said it -- that the Epistle to the Hebrews hangs upon three great prophetic utterances. The first of these utterances is Psalm 110 and verse 4, in which the David in the Psalm says “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent: Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Now in that 110th Psalm it is stated that there is going to be a new priesthood. Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now put yourself back in the time in which David wrote this. Levitical priests were everywhere. They did not know anything but the Levitical priesthood, but David now by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says, “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou the Lord who is seated at the right hand of my Lord, (the first verse of the Psalm) Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” and the Lord has sworn and will not repent that this high priesthood is going to come into existence.

Now that immediately would have said to a thinking Israel, well then, our Israelitish priesthood is not a permanent priesthood, because if there is to come a Messiah who is going to be a high priest after the order of Melchizedek and an enduring priest, then evidently the Mosaic priesthood is going to be done away with. Now that is very important. That’s one of the points the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes. He says in effect that there is going to be a new priesthood.

Now priesthood was the means by which mediation took place between men and God. During the time of the Levitical priesthood, the Levitical priests were the representatives of God as well as the representative of men. They were taken from men, but they were appointed by God so that the Levitical priest was the appointed mediator between God and men. In Israelitish thinking, it is important, and in biblical thinking, of course in biblical thinking, it is absolutely essential that there be a mediator between men and God for the simple reason that we are sinners and under divine condemnation and judgment and we need someone to stand for us. Otherwise, we have no standing before God at all. So priesthood was designed for mediation, but only to point forward to the ultimate permanent priest the Lord Jesus who would come.

So here now we have announced in Psalm 110:4 a new priesthood which provides a divine mediation and a permanent mediation. That’s the first great prophetic utterance around which the Epistle to the Hebrews is built. The second is Psalm 40 verses 7 through 9, cited in the 10th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews in which the writer says, “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body has thou prepared for me; in burnt

offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O my God.”

That Psalm, Psalm 40 verses 7 through 9 speaks of a new sacrifice which would bring divine redemption. All of the sacrifices of the Levitical priests did not take away sin. They only covered sin by virtue of the authority of God for a period of time. They never were able to remove the sin of the human heart. Men in Israel were just as much sinners after they had offered the sacrifices as they were before. They were just as sinful. They were just as much under divine condemnation, but in the ritual of the Old Testament God allowed those right those sacrifices to count for them in the light of what the Son of God would do, and so the sacrifices themselves did not take away sin. They however gave those who offered the sacrifices a standing, a kind of judicial standing before God in the light of the coming sacrifice which would take away their sin.

Now a tremendous thing takes place when the Lord Jesus suffers, for when the Lord Jesus suffers, then our sins are for the first time removed. So then Psalm 40 speaks of a new sacrifice which provides divine redemption. That’s the second great prophetic utterance of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The third great prophetic utterance is the one that we have talked about in Jeremiah chapter 31. Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 31 through verse 37. Now that speaks of a new covenant as we have been saying.

Now this new covenant provides promises of perfect communion with God. So what then do we have in these three great prophetic utterances? Why we have a new priesthood by which men have mediation between themselves and God. We have a new sacrifice which is a valid sin-removing sacrifice for the first time in the history of the human race, and sins are truly removed. And then we have a new covenant relationship on the basis of which certain redemptive promises become the possession of those who are included in this New Covenant.

Now then looking at Hebrews chapter 8 verse 1 through verse 13. There are many, many things that could be mentioned here, but the important thing for us and the

important thing for the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is a minister in a superior sanctuary. He says that he’s a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. He doesn’t minister in Moses’ little tent which followed the children of Israel about. But he ministers in the tabernacle of the presence of God.

Not only that, but he offers a superior service. He does not serve the example in shadow of heavenly things, but he ministers in the heavenly place itself and there he ministers in his priestly activity of pleading the merits of the sacrifice which he has offered, both for the guilt of sin and for the power of sin in the believers’ lives. He also ministers as an advocate, so that when believers sin he ministers with reference to their sin which they have committed. He is a high priest who maintains the relationship between his people and the one who has appointed him God.

Not only that, but he also is a minister in a superior sanctuary who offers superior service based upon superior stipulations or superior promises. He hath obtained a more excellent ministry by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises.

Now the primary point that the author wants to make, however, is simply this. The New Covenant will render and has rendered the old covenant inoperative. That’s the important thing. Now you’ll notice that he cites this passage beginning at verse 7 through verse 12 from Jeremiah chapter 31, but the only thing in which he is interested is the one little word, new.

Now I guess you’ve noticed that. If you haven’t, you should note it. Because he says in the 13th verse, “In that he saith a new covenant.” In fact, the word, covenant, is supplied by our translators, as you can see. All the author says is, in that he saith new, he hath made the first old.

Now you see these Hebrew believers wondering about their relationship to the Mosaic economy. Evidently, they had been so disturbed, they were beginning to absent

themselves from the meetings of the saints. They have to be exhorted to gather together in the 10th chapter with the saints, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Evidently, they had begun to drift away from the services of the saints. Evidently, they also began to have questions and doubts about the fulfillment of the Old Testament Levitical ceremonies and rituals and promises in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

So the author wants to point out to them that their own Scriptures -- to which no doubt they were trying to appeal -- are Scriptures that in effect said that those things to which they are going back would be ultimately done away with. So the one word that he needs to prove his point is the one word, new. If he can concentrate their attention upon the fact that God in the Old Testament said, I’m gonna make a new covenant with you, that would come home immediately to them in conviction that evidently, then, the Mosaic Covenant and its service and ceremonies to which we are moving back is only a temporary thing in the mind of God. So that one word is the word that he is particularly interested in. The argument then rests upon the one word, new.

Now in the course of the verses, however, he makes a few points that we can at least comment upon briefly. As he turns to cite his text to prove his points, he first of all says something about the inferiority of the old covenant in verse 7 and 8. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, some of the texts read with it, he saith, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” Now what he is saying here in effect is that the old covenant that God made with Moses was not a faultless covenant. In other words, one cannot be saved by keeping the Mosaic covenant. It is impossible to be saved by the law of Moses.

Now of course if one were like our Lord Jesus Christ who kept it perfectly, then of course hypothetically, such a man would enter into the presence of God, but in view of the sinful nature of every one of you in this auditorium, it would be impossible for you to keep the Ten Commandments. You can see from this how foolish it is for people in

churches to give the impression that individuals are saved by things that they do.

Nothing could be more destructive of the truth of God than to stress something like that.

One of the greatest of the theologians of the 20th Century was Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield. Dr. Warfield has said in a paragraph in one of his writings, “There are at bottom but two types of religious thought in the world if we may improperly use the term, religious, for both of them. There is the religion of faith, there is the religion of works. Calvinism is the pure embodiment of former of these. What is known in church history as polygenism is the pure embodiment of the latter of them. All other forms of religious teaching which have been known in Christian Christendom are but unstable attempts at compromise between the two.” Now a lot of evangelicalism falls into this category because they are unclear on the grace of God. They talk grace but don’t understand grace.

Now there are a lot of evangelicals like that. I have a hunch if I could quiz every one of you in this auditorium there are quite a few of you in this auditorium whose thoughts are really not too straight on the doctrine of grace.

Now let me read on. I won’t embarrass you. “All other forms of religious teaching which have been known in Christendom are but unstable attempts or at compromise between the two. At the opening of the 5th Century, the two fundamental types came into direct conflict in remarkably pure form as embodied in the two persons of Augustine and Pelegius. Both were extending themselves in seeking to better the lives of men, but Pelegius in his exhortations threw men back on themselves. They were able, he declared, to do all that God demanded of them, otherwise God would not have demanded it.”

Now that’s a pretty cagy kind of argument. Why would God tell us to do something if we did not have the power to do it? “So all men are able to do that which God has demanded of them; otherwise God would not have demanded it. Augustine on the contrary pointed them in their weakness to God. He himself, he said in his pregnant

speech, he himself is our power.” And Luther, a good Augustinian monk who had studied Augustine, and as a result of his studies and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit was the father of the Reformation, Luther came to the evangelical understanding of the truth that the reason God had given these exhortations to us was because they reflected his preceptive will and further, now that men had sinned and were in sin, the exhortations of the word of God were exhortations which were designed by God to reveal that we could not in ourselves do them -- not that we could but that we couldn't. Erasmus never could understand that. That's why Erasmus is the most pitiful figure of the Reformation era, insofar as I can tell a man, who never came to understand the grace of God, but who came so close that he would have been very acceptable in many of our evangelical churches.

The one is the religion of proud self-dependence; the other is the religion of dependence on God. The one is the religion of works; the other is the religion of faith. The one is not religion at all; it is mere moralism. The other is all that is in the world that deserves to be called religion. “Just in proportion as the attitude of faith is present in our thought, feeling, life are we religious.” Professor Warfield says. “When it becomes regnant in our thoughts, feeling, life then are we truly religious.” Calvinism is that type of thinking in which it has become regnant.

Now we don't have to take the brand name for ourselves. Calvinism. Really all that he is saying is that this is Paulinism, this is biblical teaching. And of course it includes the doctrine of the unfree will, too; for that too is biblical doctrine. We do not have a free will. Our wills have been affected by sin and we cannot of ourselves believe. Now until we come to understand that we do not understand grace. Now did you understand that? You answer the question for yourself. Where would you have stood?

Now you can see from this statement that the author makes here about the first covenant for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should not have been placed

for the second. If men could be saved by what they do, then there would be no need for a gracious new covenant of God. But rather God found fault with the other.

Now of course, anyone who reads the Old Testament immediately realizes that all that the Old Testament teaches is that men could not keep the law of Moses. While Moses was in the mount receiving the law from God, the children of Israel were already breaking it down below. He only spent a few days away from them, and Aaron and the rest of them decided that what they needed was a molten calf which they made and which they began to worship saying, “These be thy God so Israel which have brought thee out of Egypt.” And Moses before he can even give the children of Israel the law has to break the tables in exasperation over the disobedience of the people.

Now that is a picture of your human heart. So the Ten Commandments cannot save. No moral system can get us to heaven. What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. James Stiffler has said, “The law the anchor but it would not hold in the mud bottom of the human heart.” The law itself is all right but it will not hold in the human heart.

Now I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking it cannot really be true that men are quite as sinful as this. What about those little children? While we were in California we had a very interesting letter that came from my wife’s first cousin, and I’m just gonna read you a little about it because it illustrates the nature of the human heart and even of that most of that purest kind of human heart: a grandchild.

Now this is not my grandchild, but Mary’s first cousin wrote her, and her grandson is named Richard. And in the course of her letter she said -- he’s either three or four -- Richard adores my Betsy. Now that’s Mary’s cousin’s dog. Adores my Betsy and kills her with love. She’s always sick from being mauled when he leaves. He wanted to take her to bed. She has sense enough to run when he calls her, so he wanted me to call her. When I wouldn’t he got so angry with me that he almost exploded. He was getting ready

to go to bed. He got down on his knees to say his prayers. I’ve told you about his real grasp on prayer, and this little boy is the kind of little child three or four years of age that doesn’t just pray a little prayer like most of our children. This little boy has been around people who pray and so he agonizes in prayer. He says, O God. He prays with a great deal of fervor, O God.

So he got down on his knees to pray, so he began to pray and in a after a couple of sentences he said, and this is exactly what she said, “God bless—“ then there was a pause and he said through clenched teeth “--Not granny! She’s mean, and I don’t like her, and bless the bugs that ate up her roses.” [Laughter, Johnson laughs] Now do we think little children are going to heaven? You think little children do not have the sin nature? You think it’s possible to believe that little children are pure? They’re not. Their little evil natures are manifest from the moment that they’re born. In fact, they’re all born in rebellion if you watch them. They’re just born clenching their fists like this. Everything that issues forth from human nature is found in that little infant deposited in the crib.

Now then having said a word about the inferiority of the Mosaic Covenant, because it does not have much with which it can work the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrew speaks of the superiority of the new. There’s no need for me to read it again. You’ve read it in Jeremiah 31. We’ve already read it here. He speaks about the negative characteristics of the New Covenant and then the positive characteristics and chiefly stresses the fact that the forgiveness of sins is conveyed through the New Covenant and then reaches his conclusion in that he saith a new covenant he hath made the first old.

Now what he wants to say by that is simply this. That the New Covenant which has come through the ministry of the Lord Jesus and has been inaugurated in his blood, ratified by sacrifice, that New Covenant is superior to the old covenant, because what the old covenant could not do, this new covenant does do, and that is, give the forgiveness of sins. And for the Hebrews, the key word is the word, new, because it lets them know

that all of their trust in the old covenant at the moment should vanish in the light of the promise of a new covenant.

That word new then is the key word. The whole argument hinges upon it. That word, new, has made the old covenant inoperative. It’s very much like the appearance of color television. The moment that color television appeared, all of our old black and white TVs suddenly became old. So the coming of the New Covenant has done away with the old.

Now let’s turn over to Hebrews chapter 10. In Hebrews chapter 10, we have another word with reference to the New Covenant for in this passage the author again quotes Jeremiah chapter 31. He is talking now about the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus which has perfected forever them that are sanctified. That’s what he says in the 14th verse. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

The Old Testament priests day after day, month after month, year after year, actually century after century, offered sacrifices which could never take away sin. As a matter of fact, even when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, was writing, there were still priests that were offering these sacrifices which could never take away sins. They did that until 70 A.D. when the city was destroyed, so that they offered offerings constantly. The very fact that they kept on offering them over and over and over again the author says is the reason one of the reasons we know that they were invalid. They did not take away sin, because they had to be offered over and over again, so they were ineffective.

But the Lord Jesus has come and he has offered one sacrifice for sins forever, and he has sat down, something no priest in the Old Testament ever did in the Tabernacle. There was actually no chair in the tabernacle as you know, because they were constantly about their business, they never could sit down. God in hundreds of years before planned it all in his providential grace in such a way that the ministry of the priests in the Tabernacle would beautifully picture all of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and even such a

simple little thing as no chairs in the Tabernacle, no coffee break when they could sit down and have a few moments of rest in the Tabernacle when they were doing their business. They had to keep everlastingly at it because all of that pictured the fact that their work never really accomplished anything eternally. But this man has come, has offered his sacrifice on the cross at Calvary has ascended to the right hand of God, and there he has sat down from henceforth expecting until his enemies be made the footstool of his feet.

Now if chapter 8 stresses the abrogation of the old covenant by the new, then chapter 10 stresses the forgiveness of sins under the new, and it is the Holy Spirit you’ll notice who witnesses to the forgiveness of sins, and I want you to notice this, he does not witness to the forgiveness of sins in the hearts of the people -- that’s all right, that’s all right; it’s all right for the Holy Spirit to witness in the heart to certain truths -- but the Holy Spirit witnesses here to the word. That’s what he says in verse 15. “And the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us for after that he had said before” and now he cites Jeremiah 31.

In other words it is the work of the Holy Spirit to witness to the word of God in our heart. That’s why so many people in my opinion make so many mistakes in their Christian lives. They retreat behind, I think it was God’s will for me, when one sees the Scriptures speak contrary to the action that was taken. So often over and over again I’ve heard people say, But I have peace about doing this. Just the other night in California we were sitting in the living room a certain truth was mentioned. I think the Bible speaks very plainly about these truths, this truth that was mentioned. The individual said, “I do not follow that particular teaching; I have peace in my heart about it. God has spoken in my heart and I’m resting in that.” But I think a great mass of scholarship stand behind this, I think the passages of Scripture teach otherwise.

So what can we say? That was not the Holy Spirit speaking. That was not the Holy Spirit speaking. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the word of God, in the human heart, in the Christian heart. So everything that we do must be supportable by Scripture. If

what we are doing, regardless of how much peace we may think we have, if what we are doing is contrary to something in the Scriptures then the peace that we have does not come from God it comes from Satan. That’s very important. Extremely important. So the Spirit witnesses to the word. Whereof the Holy Spirit is a witness unto us.

Now of course the Spirit witnesses to the word in our hearts, but do not separate the word from the Spirit. They belong together. “And the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us, for after he had said before this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts and in their minds will I write them and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Now if you are a careful student of the Bible you will notice that in this citation from Jeremiah 31 he has only given a portion of it. Now in citing this passage from Jeremiah, the author in verse 16 says, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts, and in their mouths will I write them.” He cites the first part of that citation he omits the intervening part and then cites the concluding verse of the passage.

Now the reason that he does that is because he’s not interested in all of the content of this citation. He again is only interested in one statement, and it’s the climactic statement, their sins and iniquities I will remember no more. So really we should render this, And the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us, for after that he said before, verse 16 verse 17, then he saith, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Now if you knew Greek, I could at this point stop and give you about ten minutes to try to show you that that is the rendering that is demanded by the context. So after saying this, then, he said their sins and iniquities I will remember no more, and that’s the important thing that he wants to get over. In other words, the point that he wants to make is that there is such a thing as the forgiveness of sins. Now remember, if you’re a Hebrew Christian and you have had the background of the Levitical system with these constant offerings of animals which could never take away sin year after year, the same

old offerings and ceremonies, to hear this decisive word, “their sins and iniquities I will remember no more,” why that would bring a tremendous thrill. Eternal forgiveness of sins! What a tremendous blessing it is to know that in having the forgiveness of sins I have complete and final forgiveness of sin. That’s what he’s saying. Comes through the ministry of the New Covenant and the Lord Jesus Christ. Two times he says, no more. Verse 17: their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Now of course as a mere act of memory, God cannot forget it, but as sins that condemn God has no remembrance. It is the work of God to forgive. Ophilla, who was a theologian, fairly well known, said, “He that falls into sin is a man; he that grieves a sin is a saint; he that boasts of sin is a devil. Someone else said after that: only one thing more he that forgives it is God.” Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.

And then verse 18 Now where remembrance of these is there is no more offering. No more remembrance of sin leads to no more offering of sin which leads to no more conscience of sins, and that is the privilege of the believe in the Lord Jesus, who through the work of Christ has been delivered from sin so that he no longer stands under the guilt of sin. We don’t have guilt for sin.

Now guilt is a very important part of God’s economy. Our psychiatrists are finally coming around to realize that guilt is good. They used to think it was bad. In fact I guess most of them still do. But some of the more enlightened ones are beginning to see that guilt has some use. The reason that men feel guilty when they sin is because it’s God’s way of trying to prick their conscience and say, what do you want to do about your guilt. In fact, good guilt is just as good a thing in the spiritual sphere as pain is in the physical. If I were to put my hand in a fire and could feel no pain I might discover I didn’t have a hand after a little while. But God has given me physical pain as a warning and as a protection. And spiritual guilt is designed to bring us to the sense of condemnation unto God so that we will flee to Christ for deliverance. No more offering. “Well that’s the last the decisive word of the argument,” Professor Westcott has said. “This truth might well

make David dance before the ark of the Lord,” Spurgeon said. I’m not asking you to dance except in your heart.

Now the final passage just a moment, chapter 13 verse 20 and 21. Most of us know Hebrews chapter 13 verses 20 and 21 because some preachers use it in pronouncing the benediction. Verse 20 and 21 of Hebrews chapter 13. This is the author’s final doctrinal word in the form of a public prayer for sanctifying power. Listen to him as he says, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever.” This I say is the author’s final word and it’s a public prayer for sanctifying power from God, and it, too, as these other two passages is related to the New Covenant.

Now it’s possible that in this statement on the everlasting covenant, we have reference to the eternal covenant of redemption. On the other hand, in light of the fact that in the Epistle to the Hebrews he has already twice quoted from the historical New Covenant, it seems more likely that he is referring to this as the everlasting covenant, because it gives an everlasting forgiveness of sins.

But the truth is the same under any circumstances, because the historical New Covenant is simply the unfolding of promises that are contained in the everlasting covenant of redemption. So he begins by saying, now the God of peace who brought again from the dead, the great shepherd’s resurrection secured by the blood of the covenant is the measure of the Father’s power. May the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus think of the power manifested in that that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect. The covenant is the ground upon which the work of the Lord Jesus is able to do that which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews prays for. So may the God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will -- equipment to do the will of God.

Do you notice that is not something that we do; it is something that he does? May the God of peace make you perfect. He works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And he closes with a word about the source of it. Through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever.

O the beauties of the doctrines of the word of God and the doctrine of the New Covenant, this gracious undertaking of God whereby through the saving work of the Lord Jesus he guarantees for all who believe forgiveness of sins and the other blessings mentioned in that covenant. What a tremendous thing that is. I can only say I feel very sorry for those who do not like the doctrines of the word of God.

J. Gresham Machen, one of the great orthodox evangelicals of the 20th Century said, “Indifferentism to doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.” Spurgeon said, “It’s the preacher’s duty to expose error even though it is held by saintly believers.” Martin Luther put it even more sternly when he declared, “Cursed be that love and cursed be that unity for whose sake the word of God be put at stake.” So I can only say I love the teaching of the word of God and the Holy Spirit witnesses to the word. May God help us to study the Scriptures and to live by them. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for the privilege of the study of the word of God, and we ask Thy blessing upon us as we conclude this study of the New Covenant, that gracious undertaking that only awaits time for its ultimate complete fulfillment to Judah and the children of Israel.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.