

HEBREWS CHAPTER 9: COVENANT LOVE, FORGIVENESS, AND ACCEPTANCE

We are in the Ninth chapter of the Book of Hebrews . . . we'll read the first ten verses:

"Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was tabernacle which is called the holy of holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tablets of the covenant. And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second only the high priest *enters*, once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation."

In these verses the pride of the Hebrew worshiper is described. His regulations on how to worship, how to serve God, and what to do when he came into this holy place were from God. It was God who gave him the regulations of divine worship and it was God who told him how to perform the divine worship. He did not just have one priest . . . he had many priests and always he had a high priest . . . and the priests had to be born into that the prestigious position. And in Heb 9, verse 6, he says they continually performed divine service on behalf of the people.

There is a note of sadness in all of this as we see the extent of the building of the tabernacle and the establishing of all of this ritual and this service . . . **the sad part of all of it is stated in verses 9 and 10** -- all of this divine ritual and this continual performance of service was only "a symbol for the present time. Accordingly to which both gifts and sacrifices were being offered but they could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience." **Whatever he did and however he did it, it did not make him "perfect in conscience"** since they relate only to food and drink and various regulations for the body imposed until a time for reformation. **They were only temporary** . . . so it's sad to see all of this going on and to see **how useless it had become.**

But verse 11 says, "But Christ appeared" . . . and when Christ appeared, all of this changed. You see, the priests' concern in this Service were with regulations and performance of divine service. **But is stated that the purpose of Christ and His concern was to prepare a people to be able to serve the living God . . . verse 14, " . . . the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, [will] cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."**

What the new covenant is all about is that He has prepared a people, not simply to perform divine service, not to continue in regulations of divine worship . . . but **He has prepared a people who can serve the living God** . . . not in a tabernacle or a holy place, but in a

kingdom that is in covenant relation with Him to serve the living God . . . and for this reason, verse 15, He is that mediator of the new covenant . . . He is in charge of the new covenant and is making it real in His people . . . and when He is in it and when He is mediating the new covenant, it is more than just ritual and service.

Now in the making and the meaning of the new covenant, Christ did three things:

1. We have discussed from the Book of Hebrews the background of the covenant (and really the coming of the new covenant is prophesied by Jerimiah and what it meant), but basically I think in these 9th and 10th chapters, **the meaning of the covenant comes out very clearly in three things that Christ did, and these three things are being mediated today in the church.**

Verse 12 says it was through His own blood that he obtained eternal redemption . . . that says that first of all He loved us. Anytime you read of the fact of Christ giving His blood, that He died . . . it speaks of the great love of God. In the first chapter of the book of Revelation, and verse 5, Jesus is being described this way: "He is the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, the ruler of the Kings of the earth. **To Him who loves us (Present Tense -- He loves us), and released us from our sin by His blood."** **The blood on the covenant says He loves us.**

God spoke of this love to the Hebrews in the **7th chapter of Deuteronomy . . . in verse 7**, he says, "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love him and keep His commandments." **His covenant with you is based upon the fact that He loves you**, and there is no other explanation for it.

The second thing He did in making covenant . . . not only did He love us, but beyond our comprehension, He forgave us. **Heb 9, verse 14**, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**" There is no longer any consciousness of sin because we have been forgiven. **That's what the covenant is all about . . . He has forgiven us and we stand before him forgiven . . .** our favorite word of the apostle Paul was "justified," and **to be justified is to be "just as if I never sinned at all."**

Colossians chapter 2, and verse 13, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions . . .** " He has forgiven us all our transgressions -- **the basic element of covenant that is brought about by the fact that God loved us through Christ is that He also forgave us . . . and that forgiveness was complete.** He discusses that in chapter 10 of Hebrews, which will be noting more later . . . but he first quotes from Jerimiah saying, "And their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more." When God forgives us, He remembers our sins no more . . . the Psalmist says our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west . . . and so he says, in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 18, "Now where there is forgiveness of these

things, there is no longer any offering for sin."

I've said it time and time and time again . . . and I will keep saying it as long as the Lord gives me strength . . . **there is no more that you can do other than what He has already done . . . YOU ARE FORGIVEN OF YOUR SINS AND YOU CANNOT ADD TO IT.** No wonder Paul said, "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" . . . **we are not condemned before Him. He has loved us and He has forgiven us.**

The third element of covenant is that **"He has accepted us."** And I think that's brought out in **Hebrews chapter 10, and verse 19**, when he said, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (**the holy place being describe in the book of Hebrews as heaven**). He said, "we have confidence to come boldly before the throne of grace" . . . we have confidence to know that we are at any time and at all times in His presence . . . we are actually "sitting with Christ in heavenly places" . . . we have in the words of **Ephesians "we have been brought near," something that in the Old Testament even high priest could not understand. We have been brought so near that is described as "He being in us and we in Him." In other words, He has accepted us.**

It is through His love and it through His blood that we have been "brought nigh." One version translates Ephesians 1:6 that we have been **"accepted in the beloved"** . . . we have been accepted in the beloved.

The new covenant means that He loved us . . . it means that He forgave us . . . and it means that He accepts us.

Now, the realization of covenant . . . for us to live in covenant life . . . and to be a new covenant people enjoying all of the privileges of covenant . . . what He did to make covenant a reality must be worked out in our lives.

You see, He has done this in order that we might serve the living God. And to serve the Living God, and to be a part of covenant life, and to see covenant life worked out in our lives [as Paul said, "work out your own salvation" (what He has put in you, "work it out," in other words let it come out of you in your life) . . . **in order to do that, we must love as He loved , we must forgive as He forgave, and we must accept as He accepted.**

I think the church as wondered away from that . . . **we have strayed from the reality of that because we haven't understood covenant.**

We must love as He loved, remembering that we are the body of Christ and whatever Christ does He does it in and through His body . . . that's what being church, being Christian, being a congregation is all about.

I think the best definition of love . . . and we have used love to define everything from some kind of sentimental-gushy feeling that I have about a person and to what I think about strawberry shortcake . . . Love . . . Paul gives us a good definition of love in **Ephesians, the fifth chapter, when he is describing the church and comparing it to the love relationship between husband and**

wife . . . and he says in **verse 25**, and he is not defining love here . . . I just draw this out as being one of the best scriptural definitions of love that I know . . . he says, "Husband's love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Husband's love your wives just as, in the very same way, that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. **We love others when we give ourselves up for each other . . . or when we give ourselves up for another** . . . Paul says that is what the husband does for his wife . . . he gives himself up for her sake.

Let's go back to First John, chapter 3, in verse 14, "We know (John says) . . . (there are a lot of things we can know regardless of what some fundamentalist preachers might tell you . . . and John says, in this case, that "we know") **We know we have passed out of death into life** . . ."

Now there is no mistake about whether or not you're living in death or you are living in life . . . he said we know . . . **we know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren** . . . not because we have done something to merit God accepting us . . . not because we have been faithful in our ritual and in our duty . . . not because we have become holy people and continue in prayer and supplication and bible study and church attendance and witnessing and all of those good things that go on in the church . . . he said we know we have passed out of death into life **because we love** . . . we love the brethren.

Vs. 14, "He who does not love (he says) abides in death" . . . he lives in a state of death . . . that is the state the world is in -- the state of death. The Old Testament says it has made a covenant with death.

Now we know we have passed out of that state and into the state of life . . . eternal life . . . the life of God . . . the life which is above anything that the world knows . . . the life which is eternal because it comes from the eternal Father . . . we know we have passed out of that death and into life because we love . . . we love the brethren.

Jesus talked a lot about love . . . John chapter 13, verse 35, a familiar statement, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The basic criteria that Jesus gave us to identify the Christian is the one criteria that is **seldom mentioned in the religious world today** as being the criteria whereby we judge or discern the church.

By this (not by your doctrine, not by your knowledge, not by what you believe or what you don't believe . . . not by the position you hold or by the name you hold over the door of your church or by your attendance record, or participation in your programs) . . . but By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another . . . and this is the only criteria that Jesus gave . . . the standard is loving one another.

He said in John chapter 14, verse 23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode in him." Romans 5:5 says, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." It is the Holy Spirit that has brought the love of God into our hearts . . . and that just shows that we have the Holy Spirit . . . it is not the speaking in tongues, or that we become emotional, or that we enter into a new phase of worship . . . the fact that proves that we have the Holy Spirit is

that we love.

So, the church should be saying . . . the message of the church to the outside world should be . . . if you are around us, we are going to love you . . . no matter what you, or no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, or how you look, or how you smell or how you act . . . we are going to love you . . . That is the basic command that Jesus gave the church . . . to love one another . . . and you can't be discriminatory in that love.

The second thing is forgiveness. If we are going to enter into covenant life, then we forgive as Jesus forgave . . . Ephesians 4, verse 32, he said, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted . . . (he says the evidence of that is forgiving one another, and then he qualifies that saying) forgiving each other, just as (or in the same way that) God in Christ also has forgiven you."

There is no one in this world that could say as much against you as you have said against God . . . you may not admit it, but it is true. And there is no one in this world that can do more against you than what you have done against God . . . and yet, He forgives you . . . In Christ, He has forgiven you, and he says you are to forgive others in the same way.

I like a statement of Catherine Marshall, who wrote in her book "*Something More*" . . . she said forgiveness is releasing another from your own personal judgment . . . taking your own personal judgment off a person doesn't mean that you agree with what he said or what he did, it means you do not act as his judge. As long as you do not forgive them, you are acting as their judge . . . and the message of covenant is Stop Playing God . . . you have no right to hold judgment over anyone by refusing to forgive them . . . that's a sign of vengeance, and God said vengeance belongs to Me and I will repay.

Then there is acceptance. He loved us, He forgave us, and so He accepts us . . . **Acceptance is love in action . . . it is the result of having been loved and forgiven. You cannot love someone and forgive someone and not accept them. And so, He accepted us, even to the extent that He took us into His very presence and gave unto us, which Paul said, things the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, and whatsoever things that have not entered into the heart of man, He has revealed them to us through His Spirit . . . because He has put His Spirit in us in order that we might know His mind . . . and he concludes that we have the mind of Christ . . . He accepted us in the beloved.**

You know, Jesus hung around with sinners most of His time . . . He even talked to prostitutes (good thing He did not do it in this town) . . . Jesus went to parties . . . and Jesus (Lord Help Us) turned water into wine . . . He ate rich food and drank good wine (don't fall out of your seat) because they looked at Jesus and called Him a gluttonous man, a wine bibber, and a sinner . . . that is the name they tacked onto the Son of God. He ate with publicans and he went into the homes of people with questionable character . . . and the self-righteous members of the first Jewish Church got upset with Him and called Him on the carpet about it . . . But **Jesus said I did not come to minister to you religious people, I didn't come to call the righteous to repentance but the sinners . . . people who are in need . . . those are the ones I came to minister to.**

Who is the church ministering to today? We are ministering to righteous people . . . that's why we build our cathedrals and our 1,000-member congregations . . . and that is why we have our homeless . . . and that is why we let para-church organizations take care of the people in need.

The Church is the one place on earth where people ought to be accepted . . . no matter what they are, no matter who they are, no matter what they have done, or how they look, or smell, or how they act. We do not accept their sin, but we must accept them because God accepted us.

DARE WE NOT ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER . . .

Let me close by telling you about a sermon a preacher preached . . . he got up and said there are three points to my sermon this morning . . . the people yawned and settled down getting ready to hear his three points.

He said my first point is this . . . at this time there are approximately 2 Billion people out there who are starving, who are hurting, who are confused, and who are dying out there in the world. The congregation's reaction was about the same . . . they yawned and settled back to hear his second point.

He said my second point is . . . everybody set up because only 15 seconds had passed . . . my second point, he said, most of you don't give the damn . . . and there were a lot of gasps and rumblings that flowed across the congregation.

And then he said, my third point is that . . . the real tragedy among Christians today . . . is that many of you are more concerned that I said the word damn, than you are that I said 2 Billion people are starving, hurting, confused, and dying out there in the world . . . and then he sat down.

Covenant is love and forgiveness and acceptance . . . and we can talk all of the theology about covenant all we want to . . . and study Hebrews from one end to the other, and memorize the Book of Leviticus . . . and we can know exactly how the high priest dressed and how all of that relates the Tabernacle, and what the Tabernacle means to the Christian . . . we can go through the whole Old Testament covenant in scripture . . . if we don't love and forgive and accept . . . in the words of Paul, in the 13 chapter of I Corinthians, we are nothing . . . absolutely nothing . . . That is what covenant life is all about . . . loving and forgiving and accepting . . . and it's got to be real . . . it can't be something you just mouth off . . . That's covenant.