

THE ETERNAL COVENANT: Hebrews 13:20-21

Hebrews 13:20-21 is the closing thought of the book of Hebrews. He said: "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen." He has given us enough in this book to be able to understand what he is saying when he says, in verse 21, "God . . . (will) equip you in every good thing to do His will." God will equip us in every good thing to do His will.

The second thing He says, "God . . . will work in us that which is pleasing in His sight." Those two facts are what the book of Hebrews has been all about: God has equipped us in every good thing. He has made it possible for us to draw upon the resources of heaven. He has showed us how He did that through Christ, and Christ being our high priest, the way has been open and we actually live in His presence. So it is God who equips us, we do not have to do it ourselves, we cannot do it ourselves, God equips us in every good thing to do His will. What God wants His people to do upon the earth is simply to do His will, to do what He wants done. And He equips us to do that, and then He works in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

Paul said in Philippians, chapter 2, verse 13, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will to work for *His* good pleasure." The question is how does God do that? Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 20, gives us that answer, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord." God does this, He equips us through covenant. I am sorry to say that God's people know very little about covenant. Covenant is when two parties agree to something, they bind themselves to it, and they carry it out. God has bound Himself to His people in Christ and He will do what He has said He will do. It is as simple as that. God will equip us in every good thing to do His will, and He will work in us what He wants done in us and through us because He has entered into covenant with us in Christ.

So the question is, how can I know that God will do this? How can I know that these things are true? Many people say, "Well, that sounds good," but to put it into practice and to live it out in our everyday life is another story. Christians agree that is what the Bible says, but they never seem to understand how to do it, so they continually ask how can I live it out in my life in a practical way?

In Genesis 15, God gave to Abraham a magnificent promise. It actually overwhelms the mind whenever we think of what God says He will do with Abraham. God told Abraham to come outside and said, verse 5, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them. And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" It seemed to be a ridiculous promise. Nobody can count all of the stars. Your descendants are going to be as many as those stars. Abraham never had a son. He was getting to be an old man, but he believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.

When God made that promise to Abraham, it is the same kind of promise that He makes to us in Hebrews 13:21. Our response to God is much like Abraham's response, Genesis 15, verse 8, "Oh Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it (this land)?" Abraham wanted to know how God was going to do that? How can I know that I can believe your promise? How can I be sure? How can I rely upon it?

God did not answer Abraham with a clap of thunder, a ball of fire, or some majestic voice assuring him that He would keep His promise. The way God answered Abraham was to send Abraham (Abram) out to get the animals, gave him instructions on what to do, and, in verse 18, "On that day the Lord made covenant with Abram." God's answer to Abraham concerning the promise that He was made to him was answered by establishing a covenant with Abraham. If I enter into covenant with you, then I am bound to do for you what I said I will do for you. That was what He was saying to Abraham. If I said, I will make your descendants as the stars of the heaven, as the sand of the sea, and as the dust of the ground, and if I said I will drive the enemy out and give you this land to possess it, I am going to do it, and you can be assured that I am going to do it because I am entering into covenant with you. The covenant God made with Abram is described in Genesis 15.

So God bound Himself to Abraham to do what He told Abraham He would do, and **the assurance He gave Abraham was that God made a covenant with Abraham. Now, carry that thought with us as we go to the Hebrews 6, and notice what God has done for us.** Beginning in verse 13, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I SHALL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.' And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men to swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them and oath given as confirmation is an end to every dispute." He reminds us of what God did for Abraham, and says, verse 17, "In the same way" that has something to do with us, in Christ.

In Christ, God is dealing with us in the same way He dealt with Abraham. Verse 17 continued, "In the same way God, desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement we who have fled (to Christ) for refuge in laying hold of the hope that is set before us." **We can believe that God will do what He said He will do in and to and for us as much as Abraham could believe because God interposed with an oath and bound Himself to us just as He bound Himself to Abraham. God secures our claim up on Him because He has entered into covenant with us in Christ. That is what He is talking about in this section of the book of Hebrews.**

The covenant then became the security and the guarantee that the purposes and the promises of God are sure. God will do exactly what He has said He will do. He gives us that assurance because He has made a covenant with us, in Christ. The reason people cannot accept, cannot get a hold of it, cannot live by it, and cannot understand it is because

in our society we know very little about covenant. But covenant gives us (the ones who are in covenant with God in Christ) a hold upon God. It gives us a right to receive what God has promised to give. That is a tremendous thing. We have a right to expect God to do what He said He would do for us.

The problem for Israel begins in Hebrews, chapter 8, verse 9, when Israel did not continue in the Lord's covenant resulting in God not caring for them. **Israel did not believe what God said, they did not live up to the covenant agreement, so God did not give them what He promised to give them. Because God promised them upon the basis of covenant, if they did not enter into it, did not want it, did not believe it, did not walk in it, then God was under no obligation to fulfill His promise to them, and God withdrew. He had the right to do that. They had no hold upon Him.**

The Hebrew writer quotes from Jeremiah the prophet. Let's go back to Jeremiah, and see the background of this, Jeremiah, chapter 7, verse 21, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh.' That is a strange thing, isn't it? God is saying instead of offering your offerings and your sacrifices to Me, burn them and eat them. Verse 22, "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices." I did not talk to them about offering burnt offerings and sacrifices. That was not what I wanted. Verse 23, "But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people, and you will walk in all the way which I command you, then it may be well with you.'"

That is what God wanted. I did not want church attendance, Sunday school attendance, worship services, giving your money, building big buildings, getting crowds and going through all of these services that you go through . . . those are not the things that I want. They may be helpful, they may seem to be necessary, but I want you to obey My voice, I want you to hear what I am saying, "and I will be your God, and you will be My people, and you will walk in all the way which I command you." Why? "That it may be a well with you."

I want you to be a part of the church, I want you to be My people, I want you to do these things in order that it might benefit your life, to become a part of what you are. **It is not just a service I want, it is not just ritual and sacrifice, take your sacrifices and eat them yourself . . . I want you to obey My voice. But verse 2, "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels." They did as they pleased, did not listen to what I had to say, did not accept My word, "and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward." And it will happen every time. Look at how far backward the church has moved in the last 2,000 years instead of forward to what God has had for us to enter into ever since the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice allowing Christ to ascend into heaven itself where He sat down at the right hand of the Father.**

When a people walk in the stubbornness of their own heart, they will go backward instead of forward every time. That is covenant, you see, it is going to happen one way or the other because God is bound by covenant. If covenant was not a part of it, maybe that would not happen, but that is the way it works. And that is the way it has worked in the church since Jesus ascended.

So, we have Jeremiah, chapter 11, verses 3 and 5, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Cursed is a man who does not heed the words of this covenant which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace saying, Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you.'" That is what God wants, "'so you shall be My people, and I will be your God,' in order to confirm the oath which I swore to your forefathers, to give them the land flowing with milk and honey, as *it* is this day." That is what I want to do, but when Israel disobeyed, they broke the covenant because unfaithfulness on either side breaks the covenant. Either side can be unfaithful and the covenant is broken.

That is the way it is in a marriage relationship, when either side breaks the covenant of marriage it is broken. **Israel broke their covenant with God. God was not under obligation then to bless Israel. Today, if we were under the Old Covenant, when we do not heed the words of the covenant, as we will see in a moment, then God would not be under any obligation to fulfill His part. He would not be obligated to equip us, not be obligated to make us what He wants us to be, not be obligated to make us do His will unless we are willing.**

So, while we are in the neighborhood, there is another thought that I want to pursue for a moment. **In the book of Jeremiah, God has some astonishing things to say because He predicts that He is going to make a new covenant. He is talking about this new people He is going to raise up. Listen to what He says in Jeremiah, chapter 32, beginning in verse 38, "And they shall be My people, and I will be their God." That is us. That is the people of the new covenant, and He is predicting that. He says, verse 39, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always." Listen to this, "for their own good, and for the good of their children after them." The best thing that anyone can do for their children is for the parents to fear the Lord themselves. If parents will fear and obey God themselves, that is the best thing they can do for their children. The children may not follow in their parents' footsteps, be that as it may, but the best thing you can do for your children is for you to walk in the way of the Lord.**

Now notice what He says next (speaking about us), Jeremiah 32, verse 40, **"I will make an everlasting covenant with them."** Listen, **"I will not turn away from them."** He turned away from Israel because Israel turned away from Him. He says in this new covenant, **"I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all of My soul."** That is God speaking.

Back in chapter 31, He had talked about this and, that is the prophecy quoted over in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. "This is a covenant I will make after those days," and it is applied to the church. Go down to Jeremiah, chapter 33, he continues talking about this new covenant, verse 19, "And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, Thus says the Lord, 'If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, that he shall not have a son to reign upon his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers.'"

That is an interesting statement. **What is He saying? He is saying I am going to make a covenant with My people that cannot be broken. I will not turn away from them because they will not be able to break my covenant. That is an astonishing.**

Let's read a couple of other passages. Ezekiel, chapter 36, verses 25-27, "**Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.**"

Ezekiel, chapter 37, the closing verses of that chapter, begin in verse 26, "**I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them.**" See, that is what the Hebrew writer said, "**And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of forever.**" That is what Hebrews is all about. Verse 27, "**My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in the midst of them forever.**" **Mark it down, the nations of the earth are going to someday recognize the presence of the Lord in the church.** I will not live to see it, and maybe you won't, but it is coming, and all of that is because of covenant.

Understand, it is an everlasting covenant, and God says it cannot be broken. That is strange. Some provision must be made for securing the obedience of the covenant people. **The new covenant provides a guarantee, not only for God's faithfulness, but for our faithfulness.** Jeremiah 32:40, "**I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them; to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from me.**" **Get a strong hold of this, please.**

Do understand what we are saying? God says, I am going to make a new covenant with My people, which they cannot break. They are not going to have any excuse for not being My people, and for not being what I want them to be because I am going to make a covenant that cannot be broken. How is He going to do this? The answer of course, is in Hebrews

13:20, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord." In the eternal covenant, Christ becomes the one who is representing us, and He is the one with whom God made covenant. That is why it cannot be broken, God made a covenant with Christ, a sinless man, and not with us, a sinful man.

It is not made with a stumbling, bumbling people who are prone to turn to idols, turn to sin, and walk in their own way. It is made with a representative of the people whose name happens to be Jesus, who was the Son of God, who represented us, who became the one who was standing in our stead. Isaiah puts it this way in chapter 42, verse 6, "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, and as a light to the nations." Christ was appointed as a covenant to the people. Christ is given to the people as a pledge of the covenant. God made an agreement with Christ, and it cannot be broken because Christ will not break it. God will not break it. It is an everlasting covenant because neither God nor Jesus will ever break it.

For us, that means that God is not going to withdraw His promises. He will fulfill them. You and I cannot break the covenant because the covenant is made between Christ and God. Christ represents you. He is not going to break it. You can be unfaithful to the covenant. You can reject it and have no part of it. Even if the whole church turned away from God like Israel did, the covenant would still stand. God's promises would be the same, they would never change. God's promises would always be available to the believer, in Christ.

If the church does not want to walk in them, God is still God. The covenant is still in force. You do not have to walk in it. You do not have to live up to the covenant, but if you do not, you may suffer consequences. Certainly, if you reject Jesus, if you are not in Christ, God is not obligated to do you good. If you reject Jesus, if you are not in Christ, you can walk in your own council and go your own way, but that is your problem.

In my opinion, one of the biggest failures the church consistently experiences is its choice to not believe God, and reject His Word, in the area of "the good" He has done for us by the church refusing to enter into all that God has made available to it now, by faith and in Christ, including heaven itself and all of its resources. As a Christian, you can live your life missing out and sacrifice an unfathomable number of eternal rewards by refusing to enter, by faith, into the promise land God made available to us in the new covenant (you are saved, but that may be about it).

If we are in Christ, Christ becomes our representative of the covenant. No wonder Paul stated in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" God will freely give us all things that we need. He will give it through Christ. Christ is the sum and the substance of our part of the covenant. He has fulfilled its terms. He now dispenses its rewards. **Do not miss out in your rewards from**

unbelief or lack of faith in what God says in His Word. Do not allow your denomination's adopted man-made doctrines, fallacies, adopted lies of Satan, and rejection of the truth rob you of your birth rites you received at your new birth to enter into and live your entire life in the presence of God before His throne in heaven itself right now, by faith.

You see, Israel had to meet certain conditions in the covenant, and then God would bless them. The way it is with us, all of the conditions that God had for His people, Christ met them for us, they are fully satisfied. The conditions are fulfilled. According to Malachi, chapter 3, verse 1, Christ becomes three things: 1) He is the messenger of the covenant, that is He makes it known. When Christ came bringing the revelation of God from heaven and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, He was the messenger of the covenant making known a new and a better way.

2) Hebrews 7:22, "He becomes the surety of the better covenant." That means that He is the one who represents us. A surety is one who represents others. He fulfills the obligations in their name and for their benefit. Christ never did anything for Himself. The many things He did was never for Himself. Everything He did was always for us, because He did not have to do it for Himself. He did it for us. He represented us. There is not a single unpaid sin-related obligation we owe to God. We owed obligations we could never pay. Christ has perfectly and fully discharged all of them. In covenant, God then holds nothing against us because all of our debts, all of our sins, all of our obligations to God have been fully paid for in Christ. He paid the entire debt-in-full. He settled all our liabilities. The song said, "My sins, all of them, not just part of them, were taken to the cross."

That frees us then to walk without all of this sin, without all of that burden, and without the obligation of trying to get rid of it because it is already gone. **We are free, Paul says in Galatians, to serve God.** Why do so many Christian people not serve Him as they should? Because they are still bound-up with these other obligations and things. They still do not know or cannot accept that Christ has already paid them. They are not walking in covenant life yet. God is steady. He is there. He is going to fulfill His promises whether we walk in it or not.

3) Hebrews 9:15, "He is the mediator of a new covenant." As the mediator, He imparts all the blessings of the covenant to the beneficiaries. **Hebrews has described the benefits we have because we are a part of this new covenant. We have access to God. We have the way open. We have Jesus as our mediator. We have help in the time of trouble. We have all of our obligations satisfied, in Christ. That is covenant life which God imparts (freely gives) to us through Christ.**

There is a small passage in Galatians 3 which shows the truth of this: that the new covenant was made with Christ, and all of the promises that God made to Abraham in the Old Testament were not to the Jews as a nation, but to Christ, and those who are in Christ, in the new covenant. Galatians, chapter 3, this is a remarkable passage, verse 16, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds' (plural), *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ."

Prophecy preachers that tell us that God made all of these covenant promises to Israel, to the nation of Israel, and God has to fulfill them to the nation of Israel, that the coming kingdom is going to be a fulfillment of all the prophecies that He made to the Jews, they do not what they are talking about because Paul said the promises were not made to Abraham and to Abraham's seeds (the Jewish people, the nation of Israel). The promise was made to Abraham and his seed, that is, Christ. When God made all of those promises in the Old Testament, He made them to Abraham and his seed, Christ. Paul says, God did not make them to Israel, the Jewish people, or the Jewish nation, as "seeds." To this day, the nation of Israel rejects Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This not a political statement . . . go down to verse 26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism initiates us into the covenant. We are clothed with Christ. Verse 28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." **Now, verse 29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring (seed), and heirs according promise."**

When God told Abraham He would bless him, God made that promise to Abraham and to his seed, Christ. If we are a part of Christ, we are Abraham's "seed" and "heirs according to promise. Did you get that?

The execution of the covenant was undertaken by Christ. Christ fulfills it. It is an eternal covenant. It is the basis for God's work in us. You do not have to do a lot of good things in order to get God to do what He said He was going to do to for you. God does not do for you on the basis of what you do for Him. Now, grant you, there are many blessings that come by obeying God, but God does not do what He said He would on the basis of what we do for Him. He fulfills His promises upon the basis of covenant. If we want to partake of those promises, benefit from them, and have God do in us what He said He would do in us, and do for us what He said He would do for us, the thing for us to do is get our lives lined up with Jesus Christ as the Lord of our life (He is in charge, we died, His life should be only life living in us).

When we get our lives lined up with Jesus Christ and He is Lord of our life, then God begins to work in us that which He promised He would. It is on the basis of our relationship and our standing with Christ that we receive the blessings of God. That is what covenant means, you see? We do not have to be real good for God to bless us. We do not have to do a lot of good things for God to bless us. We do not have to become a certain kind of person on our own in order for God to bless us. We need to get our lives straightened out with Jesus Christ, He is Lord, and make sure that we are a part of Him, and that we are living according to His words and according to His command, that we are doing His will. When we are in Christ, then we become beneficiaries of what God said He would do and God blesses His people because of Christ.

If we are in the right relationship with Christ, covenant blessings are found. That takes a load off of you and me, you see. That takes a great deal of responsibility off of us. We do not have to prove ourselves to God because Christ has already proved Himself to God, and I am in Christ, and as long as I am walking according to the Word of God incarnate, then God is going to work in me that which He wants to. See how that works? That is important. That is what covenant is all about. That is the eternal covenant through which God raised Christ from the dead. He therefore becomes the one who makes all this possible.

Enter in to all God has for you in Christ. Do not push the greatest opportunities in this universe over yonder, except your new bodies. All else, everything in heaven and on earth, are available to you now, by faith, in Christ Jesus.