

Hebrews: Its Background (Part One)

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We are going to begin this sermon by reading from Hebrews the eighth chapter. I am going to read the first thirteen verses there, which is the whole chapter.

Hebrews 8:1-13 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at 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 erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if he were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For he said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." [The one who said that part was God to Moses.] But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, the days are coming, says 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; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know

Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

We are beginning with this series of verses because the author himself tells us flat out that this is the major reason for all he has written in the book—what is now the book of Hebrews—to this point. A summary of what he is saying here (now listen carefully) is that Christianity is the only religion on earth that operates led by a spiritual High Priest situated at the right hand of the throne of God from heaven and that spiritual High Priest is also God.

Now within with the subject material of which the author has written, are two major points. First and foremost are the qualifications for this great towering Personage holding such an important office, so that he is indispensable to the salvation of all of God's sanctified ones. Indispensable? Absolutely! Jesus Christ tells us Himself in John 15:5 that in order for us to produce fruit that glorifies God, without Him, we can do nothing. That High Priest is so important, that high priest that was, say, introduced to us here in the book of Hebrews, is so important, we cannot go anywhere spiritually without Him making it possible. Now if we do not glorify God, tell me what good reason would motivate Him to put us in His Kingdom? Therefore Jesus Christ, as our High Priest, has much to offer, because without Him we will *never* be in the Kingdom of God! He is that important to us.

And so this book is devoted to the ministry that He gives to us, and this book explains that ministry.

Remember, I said that there are two major reasons that he has covered in Hebrews. However, the second major reason for the epistle is not named here, but it is a major historical reality regarding why this epistle was written in the first place. Now there are two sub-points that he does cover. They are these: The first is that the Old Covenant and Judaism and all of their attendant features were never intended by God to last forever. I will show you this in just a little bit to give you proof of that. That is perhaps one

reason why the New Covenant is announced all the way back in Jeremiah's time, long before Jesus Christ was born and preached and Christianity became a reality on the world scene.

The second sub-point is that in the transition following the Promised Seed's birth—remember Christ was the Promised Seed—His preaching, the beginning of the church, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, church members needed clear uniform instruction from on high to confirm to them the direction Jesus, the High Priest, wanted the daily religious operations of Christianity to proceed. That is what the book of Hebrews is about. It is about the Priest Himself and how the High Priest wants operations to continue on a daily basis, and those instructions are given in the book of Hebrews. That is why we are looking into it in detail. Of all of the covenants it is easily the most important to you and me. All the others pale in to comparison with the New Covenant.

Even as the book of Leviticus contains detailed instructions for the daily spiritual operations under the Old Covenant, so instruction was needful for daily spiritual operations under the New Covenant because of what had happened, and was still happening in their world then and since. The Epistle to the Hebrews contains that instruction so that those who made the New Covenant with God would make the necessary adjustments in order to maintain their lives living by faith, glorifying God, maintaining their relationship with Christ, while preparing for the Kingdom of God.

We have just finished a long series of sermons searching for helpful understanding on a number of covenants God made with His sanctified ones, who at that time in history were primarily Jewish. Now this time was immediately following Christ's resurrection. Covenants are important to our spiritual well being. God's overall intention regarding covenants is to give His sanctified ones some specific direction as to what he desires off those specifically within His purpose and living by faith. This is exceedingly important to us because we are already on the path to the completion of His purpose in our lives due to our being called.

Let us understand. Remember, I titled that series "Leadership and Covenants." He is not looking for qualities the world extols and rewards people for. He is seeking to continue the developing of personal leadership in

qualities of character and attitude, molded and shaped in the image of His own within family and community life.

As we begin this series on the Epistle to the Hebrews, I want to leave the previous series with a few basic reminders regarding covenants. This is because much of the Bible's recording of both biblical and worldly history revolves around three covenants. Now though I am beginning this series on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews is intimately connected to the New Covenant. That is why I began the way I did. I began by reading to you a basic section of the New Covenant, and the book of Hebrews is intimately connected to the New Covenant. Therefore this series is intimately connected to the "Leadership and Covenants" series as well.

This transition that I am giving right now as we move toward the Epistle to the Hebrews series may take us a while before we actually get into the book of Hebrews. Now of all the covenants that I gave some information on in that long series, three are really important to us—impact on us.

First is the covenant with Abraham. Second is the covenant made with Israel, commonly known as the Old Covenant, and third is the one commonly called, even within the Bible itself, a new and better covenant. Those three really impact on our lives, on our relationship with God.

A covenant, using the terms simplest definition, is nothing more than a formal agreement between parties to accomplish a goal together. They are commonly used in business transactions throughout the world for stating, and therefore guiding the specific obligations of each party involved in the covenant's purpose. Covenants are the primary way in which the Bible formally assigns overall responsibilities in the relationship between God and His people and, to a very limited extent, they also serve to guide humanity generally, so that mankind has a big basic awareness of *its* obligations to the Creator, even though they do not know much in the way of the details of it. It is guiding to them to a limited extent.

Now for converted church members, having clearly assigned and defined responsibilities within a covenant is a great advantage because then there is no doubt as to what our obligations are to God and to fellow man to accomplish the purpose that we have been called to and guided to join forces

together to achieve. Even without a formal covenant perhaps one would not even be necessary if we would follow God by keeping His commandments even as He does.

The first basic requirement is that no covenant with God excludes this absolute obligation. Covenants with God *always* require that we keep His commandments. That is attached to every covenant with Him. Now whether they are literally stated matters not. That is, the commandments are literally stated or the *obligation* to keep those commandments is literally stated. So whether they are literally stated, it matters not, because God's overall purpose is to create character and stop sin regardless of what covenant is in effect at the time.

Now in His people this includes the New Covenant. However even the very best of us do not do this as well as we could. And mankind has very clearly never shown the willingness to set such high standards as appear in the covenants that God makes with man. Only the converted, those truly living by faith, will set their minds to accomplish this and this is serious business. Covenants made with God are serious business, and even as carnality is set on things earthly, the converted mind must set itself on things heavenly for this to be accomplished. That is, what needs to be accomplished is the keeping of the commandments.

Now a second always-present standard in every covenant with God, is that all covenants made with God are between *unequals*. I will explain. God is the Sovereign Creator who initiates the covenants. He makes our obligations clear and He also penalizes us when we break them. What I am saying here is that God, when He makes a covenant with people, is actively involved. This is not a fun issue and it is not a mere business issue. This is an eternal life issue. Therefore it is serious.

Whenever we read the language of any of God's covenants, it gives the distinct impression it is being conferred, even imposed, upon mankind. Even though we have a voice to accept or reject, it feels as though it is being conferred or imposed upon mankind. It is *His* voice that is transcendent. There is no dickering with Him. He sets the obligations, He sets the promises and rewards for obedience, and those promises and rewards are always generous but also require serious, faithful devotion to keep them.

Why do the obligations seem so demanding? That is partly because of Whom the agreement is with. This is no ordinary human fellow and it is intimidating. Dealing by faith with Him is daunting because there is no fudging whatever on anything! He is *always* aware. Do you understand what this means? He is one with His creation—*nothing* escapes Him. I mean for me to think about a mind with that capacity and with that ability within it is daunting, and if you are not daunted by that you are not thinking! The covenant is with Someone, not only like Him, it is *with* Him.

Directly attached to this fact is the almost overwhelming wonderment that helps produce the solid realization of purpose of this relationship. Do not let this escape you. I know you know it but I am repeating it as we glide into the book of Hebrews, and it is we are then literally part of God's personal Family. No wonder He is aware of what is going on in our life and *He is aware all the time*. His mind never goes blank—He does not suffer from Alzheimer's. Never forget, that though the standards seem very high on occasions, they are *never* unreasonable. God promises us that. He always assigns us responsibilities that are within our capacities to achieve. That makes us feel bad when we fail. "I could have done that. I should have done that, it's within my capacity," because God oversees that. He does not want to lose anybody! And so He is never, ever beyond the parameters that we are indeed able to accomplish because God is very sensitive about losing any of us.

The sermon takes a bit of a turn here and its principles here in this turn are reminders drawn from my September the 16th sermon. That was just before the Feast of Tabernacles but it was part of the "Leadership and Covenants" series. I am giving this reminder because there are clear ties between those two series. Turn with me from the book of Hebrews back to Jeremiah 31. You will recognize these words right away.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, says 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 that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that

I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their minds, I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

I went back and reread that from the book of Jeremiah because most people calling themselves Christian associate the New Covenant with the New Testament, totally unaware that the New Covenant's first mention in Scripture is in the Old Testament. God reveals it here in Jeremiah so understand this point: the New Covenant is not truly brand new even within Jeremiah's point in time. It is new only in terms of when it is being publicly announced. The New Covenant openly reflects God's unchanging standards of judging and fulfilling His creative purposes regardless of when He chooses to announce it.

Nothing is changing regarding His purpose. Nothing is changing regarding His generosity, His mercy, His desire to to give salvation. This is the way He has been from the beginning. He is still creating man in His image, He is still reproducing Himself. His character is the model being followed to produce His children. How can He change what He Himself is? He cannot! Do not forget He states, "I change not." He is *always* the faithful God. We must *always* carry this truth with us. He is ever-faithful to the covenants He imposes and the covenant and the purpose He continues to work out.

I want you to to really get this blazed, burned, into your minds. He has been the same from the beginning and the New Covenant illustrates what has been His purpose from the very beginning. That is why I started by telling you God never intended the Old Covenant to last, and Judaism, I might add here, to last for all eternity. He knew from the time that Adam and Eve were created that the time was coming when He would introduce this New Covenant to mankind. But He chose to introduce it publicly to the world all the way back 600 years before Christ. He did that prophetically so the people reading the Bible under the Old Covenant would know what was coming, and it did not come until all the Promised Seed came.

I want you to go from here to Luke 14. This is something I believe I gave in my previous sermon (on September the sixteenth) but it is so important that we keep these things in mind. Remember, the primary subject here is the New Covenant and Jesus was preaching these things when He was alive. In verse 25 look at what He lays down here.

Luke 14:25-30 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. [He is laying down responsibilities that are New Covenant responsibilities.] And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower [Here is an illustration.], does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?"

He is illustrating a person who gets baptized not having counted the cost and is therefore unprepared for the difficulty of keeping the New Covenant. Keeping the New Covenant, brethren, is tough! I want you to get this burned into your head because this is not the way the world thinks about the New Covenant. Its standards are *high*—much higher than the Old Covenant. There is no comparison and that is why Jesus is saying to these people you better count the cost. Now He does not say He is preparing them for the New Covenant but He is. That is what His whole ministry was about—for the introduction of the New Covenant. Look at the standards. He said, "If anybody comes to Me and hates not his father and mother, wife and sisters, you know children, brothers, sisters, he cannot be My disciple." Those are terms for the New Covenant. I will get to something else here in just a moment. Back to verse 30.

Luke 14:30-32 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish?' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? [Here comes another illustration.] Or else while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for

conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

He is preparing people for making the New Covenant. He goes on to another illustration.

Luke 14:34-35 "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? [What good is it?] It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

I am reflecting back on that September sermon again where I went through these verses but not quite in the same way that I did just now. I purposely drew most of the biblical references in that sermon from the New Testament because almost all people calling themselves Christian in these end times have developed the opinion that by means of the New Covenant God has made salvation much easier to obtain. Those terms that I just read do not seem very easy! He is warning people, "You better consider what you're doing." The central belief in this opinion seems to be, that since Jesus kept the laws perfectly and He in addition is the payment for the forgiveness of our sins, that when one accepts His death as payment for our sins, our obligation to meet the demands of the New Covenant is somehow magically reduced. Jesus did not say anything at all like that here in Luke 14.

In plain, everyday language, the general thought held by a high percentage of people believing themselves Christian, is that the law is essentially done away. They believe that Jesus kept them for us, and while that thought is indeed *somewhat* true, it is twisted into a misleading concept. Now listen carefully as we go through this. The key statement there, even though it is somewhat true that Jesus kept the law for us, it is twisted into a misleading concept and that concept is that we do not have to be concerned about keeping them. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Now why? Because being created into the image of God is not a minor affair because our willing participation, listen carefully, *our willing participation is absolutely necessary for this vital creation to occur*. That is the key statement there.

I am going to ask you to recall something. It is a little bit closer than September 16. You might recall, this is an illustration, Kim Myers sermon of about a month ago in which he used the illustration showing the level of dedication necessary to maintaining the purity of the incense offering. Do you remember him talking about that? Now the incense offering back in Leviticus may seem to us to have been a rather a minor affair, but as Kim showed it, it was not to God. With Jesus as our guide, perfection is our goal. Maybe you need to go back and read that about the incense offering again and see the care that God required of the people who are involved in that, and what those demands by God made of us. He wanted that incense offering to be perfect—as perfect as men could do it.

Now apply that to the New Covenant here. The reality is the New Covenant establishes, what we might call, graduate level requirements regarding the keeping of the commandments. The Sermon on the Mount makes this very clear. Let me add something here and it is important. However, God compensates by also providing us with the spiritual tools to reach those levels. He does that when we make the covenant with Him. Jesus did keep God's law for us (now listen carefully), that is, for our benefit in that God is mercifully willing to accept Jesus' righteous life and death to pay our debt to Him for our sins because we do not have sufficient righteousness on our part to pay the cost of having the death penalty removed. Make sure that gets thoroughly understood. The payment has to be made by Jesus because we cannot pay it! We are talking about the payment of the death penalty.

The explanation goes on. Something is missing in people's misunderstanding of that reality—the reality being that Jesus does keep the law for us—and therefore in their trust in that reality, which is twisted. It is *not* that Jesus did not pay, He did. He did keep them for us but they have twisted that reality by a lie. Now what is missing is the rest of the story. (Those of you are a little bit older will remember Paul Harvey. "Now here is the rest of the story.") What is missing is the truth that godly character is *not imposed*. Make sure you get this. What is being created? Godly character. And we have to participate in the making of that godly character. God does not just flip a switch and suddenly we have godly character! It is not imposed. He does not get His wand out and touch us on the forehead and suddenly we have character like a God being. It is *built!* Get this: Godly character is built, it is created. God is a Creator and the creation of that character requires our

cooperation. Jesus' righteousness is in one sense imposed on us just in order to free us from the death penalty.

Now listen to this. Like I said there is something missing in people's misunderstanding of that reality and so what is missing is the truth the godly character is not imposed it is built, it is created with the assistance off the person being worked on. That is you and me. What is missing in the world's flawed conclusion is that God's creation of each person is in reality only the beginning at one's forgiveness and the following baptism into the church and the Family of God. Now why is it that way? Because each person has to have godly character created in them one person at a time. He just does not impose, He just does not use a wand to make us created with the character of God.

The result of this is that each person has to show God he is participating in its creation in his life as he lives his life. Someone else's righteousness besides Christ does not matter one bit after that creation begins.

Here is a serious question requiring sober consideration by anyone who is thinking of baptism. Why is Jesus, here in Luke 14 beginning in verse 25, so solemnly stern in this admonition warning those considering following Him of these high standards if we do not need to be concerned about keeping the law? You see, that is just it. We *do* need to be concerned about keeping the law. That is why He is so solemn and stern as He is laying down these requirements.

So not being discussed in this tragically wrong belief at this point, is that despite Christ's wonderful gift in dying to pay our indebtedness to God, the reality is that the wages of sin remain. Please, please understand this. We are forgiven but "the wages of sin is death" continues right on. Not for us, not for those who are forgiven, but if we sin *afterward*, do we not need to seek God's forgiveness again and again and again and again? That is what they are not telling people with this twisted, wonderful thing, but that is what it is.

Our sins were forgiven. What indeed changes is that we are not just forgiven, we are given the tools to fight and win the spiritual battles which will surely

come *after* we are forgiven. And there are some of them we are not going to keep very well and we will need to be forgiven again. We are given the tools to go on to perfection, if we will believe them and use them.

Let us go to Colossians chapter 2. Remember he is talking to, writing to converted members of the Colossian congregation.

Colossians 2:13-14 And you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which is contrary to us. And has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

When we choose to be baptized, we come to Christ physically alive, but spiritually dead, because the sins still hanging over our head. We are spiritually dead, because the death penalty hangs over our head because the sins have been recorded. But this debt has not yet been paid. So God accepts Christ's death following our repentance as the means of redemption, that is, paying our debt in our stead. And this erases the death penalty against us from existence, but that erasure of the death penalty does not remove the laws we broke from the Book, only the penalty against us for breaking the laws. The laws, brethren, are still in force! Do we get that? Do not forget it.

The world's twisted belief about Christ keeping the law for us is causing them, motivating them to think that their sins are entirely paid for when they may be breaking the law over and over again, continually bringing the death penalty on themselves. Because they are not using the powers that God gives us, the tools to enable us to keep the laws. Why give us the tools if we are not going to use them? Why does He give us the powers if we just ignore them? Are you seeing? Yes, Christ kept the laws for us, not to do away with the laws, but to do away with the death penalty hanging over *our* head. But after we are forgiven we are required once again to keep the commandments, and yet they believe the commandments are done away. Ah! I used to believe that.

So notice this clear New Testament New Covenant illustration. Is it still possible to sin and experience the sting of death? Absolutely. Let us go to I Corinthians 15. This is toward the end of the resurrection chapter. Paul says, he asks,

I Corinthians 15:55-56 O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are given the victory by Christ paying the death penalty but that does not remove the laws from the Book, and the sting of death can still apply to us when we sin.

The term *sting* illustrates what is painful about sin. The painful element involved in sin is death and with death all hope is lost. The sting that we feel before the death actually occurs, is emotional. In other words, the sting begins before we actually die. The sting is first emotional but sin along the way kills! Do we believe that? Sin is the cause of death.

Knowledge of sin is given by the laws of God. That is the law's function. So in order that we do not sin, we have to understand what the law does. It tells us what is right and it tells us what is wrong and the law, not being alive, does not feel anything. It just keeps right on going. So God's laws give direction, they give us knowledge of what to do and what not to do, whether you are converted or unconverted. A converted person ought to be able to understand a great deal more but it does that for everybody. Now interestingly, by giving us knowledge of what not to do, the law actually plays a role in arousing our carnal nature to taste of it, to experience its excitement, thus arousing us to sin—this can happen to converted people—which we in turn must fight with all of our being.

I want to read to remind you again about old Adam and Eve because this appears with them all the way back at the beginning. This part where I said interestingly by giving us knowledge of what not to do, it actually plays a role by arousing our carnal nature to taste of it. Just recall this, that before Eve actually sinned by eating of the tree, she was already very intrigued by

the tree, and even being warned beforehand, she could not stop herself from eating from the tree. The knowledge of what the tree was worked on the carnality in her mind and she sinned. She wanted to be wiser. That is why she wanted the fruit of the tree. It actually produced in her a desire to sin! Now the problem was is that she did not fight it! This is one of the things that we need to learn. That the law can actually play a part in us sinning because it intrigues the carnality within us and we want to experience it. The problem was Eve did not fight it.

God's laws have never been against us, so they continue on giving guidance regarding what is right and wrong. I am going back to Jesus' teaching there in Luke 14:25-35 and some of the things that He said there. Now added to that serious fact is the family relationships that Jesus names are with those that we spend the most time with and generally want to please to the highest degree. But also they prove—that is, the family members named: father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter—to be the most influential regarding luring us into sin because we tend to let our guard down with them. Recall Adam's sin. What family member *lured* him into sin? She did not do anything except that he desired her and he wanted to experience his desire. But the law said, "Don't do that," but he could not stop himself.

Our sins imposed the death penalty on us, and it also imposed it on our Savior in the first place and still does so to this day. And if we continue sinning after the debt is paid, the laws did not change—the penalty for breaking them remains the same despite Jesus' merciful payment in our behalf. Therefore the laws continue to define sin regardless of what Jesus accomplished in our behalf. And if we continue sinning, His death for our benefit it is absolutely wasted! Specifically stated, His death pays only for sins committed in the past! Do you know that we say that with every person we baptize? We tell them that this is being done for forgiveness for sins committed in the past. That baptism and forgiveness *does not apply for what we do in the future* when we are converted and when we have God's Spirit and we still sin anyway.

The law is still putting the death penalty over our head and we have got to make sure that we are participating in the overcoming of those sins like God wants us to do. We are fighting it tooth and toenail, which Adam and Eve did not do. They knew the truth and they died and that can happen to us.

We will go just a little bit further here because I am getting to a place where a break is fairly good to occur.

So what Christ's death absolutely accomplishes is that it is the means, it is the way that opens the door for completion of the perfection of our character into the image of Jesus Christ in preparation for the Kingdom of God. And the Holy Spirit, which is then given upon baptism in the laying on of hands, is the means for keeping His laws far, far, far more perfectly.

Now sins committed in the present after accepting His shed blood can put one into the Lake of Fire because His death did not do away with our obligation to obey the law. The New Covenant does not do away with the law! It comes into effect for converted people after their repentance and after their baptism and after they have hands laid on them, but we can still bring the death penalty upon ourselves by failure to really fight sin tooth and toenail. This is because the laws still exist and are still in force giving guidance as to the general way one should live, and therefore also defining sin. Sins committed following baptism absolutely must be repented of; therefore they can have more serious consequences.

Now what we are going to do here is go to the Sermon on the Mount and I want to show you clearly what happened regarding sin. You know the world tries to tell people fables! It embarrasses me and I feel sick sometimes when I realize what they are saying. We are going to look at some very familiar scriptures beginning in verse 17. This is the sermon that in a sense began Christ's ministry and He is setting the foundation stones for the way of life that He is going to give to the people during this period of time that he is preaching before His crucifixion. So right at the beginning He says:

Matthew 5:17-19 "Do not think that I come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law [and that includes the New Covenant] till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

I did not have the same Bible with me as I had when I was putting this together. And in that Bible this section of Scripture was titled "Jesus Fulfills the Law." Now the sense people are using this term *fulfilled* is not really what He did. That term *fulfills* does not mean in this case "completes" or "does away with" as judged against what He taught in what immediately follows because He taught us to keep the law! *Fulfills* in this case means "fill to the full" or "completes what conduct they cover" or it can also be called "an expansion to its fullest intent." All of those definitions are correct. To prove that I want you to notice these illustrations that Jesus gives right here beginning in verse 21.

Matthew 5:21-25 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny."

Do you see what He is doing here? This is just one illustration. He is clearly showing here in this foundational sermon that He is raising the acceptable level of obedience far higher above what the people ordinarily considered as satisfactory behavior. He is raising the standard of the keeping, obedience to God's law, to the level of its *intent*, not just doing the act but the intent behind, or that motivates the act.

Matthew 5:21-22 'You have heard it was said to those of of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his

brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment." [That is a great deal higher standard than murder.]

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Do you see that? I am showing you that Jesus Himself not only said the law is not done away, He is raising the standards of the laws that exist. He is making the keeping of them stricter and higher.

I want I just want to go back to Revelation 12 and we will conclude with this.

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

My comment for this is: What a cruel joke Satan has deluded the unconverted masses with.

As we saw in the September 16th sermon, being a Christian obligates one to a great deal of sacrifice. So why do people make these sacrifices since the price one pays for forgiveness is one of devotion in obedience to the leadership of Jesus Christ, who just elevated the requirements of the keeping of the commands of God exceedingly higher than they had been? I ask this, because this entering into the New Covenant will require the sacrifice of every function of one's body. We have to become *living* sacrifices—in body, in mind, and in spirit to the way of God—and it can be very costly.

It may cost one his employment because of Sabbath work requirements. It may cost one his family attachments because the family may not accept one's membership with this strange group. It may cost one his general acceptance within the community for the same reason. But we commit for two basic reasons.

The first is personal and somewhat self-centered. It is because we want out from under the burden of the death penalty combined with the awesome

rewards of God's promises and eternal life, sharing life and life's work with our Creator and Savior. The second is because we are growing in love for God and the completion of His purpose in us, and therefore through baptism, we desire the means of expressing that love for Him. And for others too, as God continues forward with His creative purposes, preparing us for active participation in God's Family Kingdom.

So do not ever let Romans 5:1-5 slip from your mind, because they are *so encouraging*. It remains as a brief but constant reminder that the New Covenant enables us, it empowers us in ways no covenant, even with God, before has. It does not erase laws, just the penalty we have incurred for breaking them. And it gives us His Spirit to compensate.