

Hebrews 10:15-25

Theme: You live in the new covenant

Not once has anyone come to me after an out of state trip to request ceremonial cleansing even though the law requires it. No one's repented for wearing blended fabrics, as forbidden by the old law. I've never slaughtered your ram and burned it on the altar as atonement for your sins. I haven't because those practices belonged to the old covenant and are a shadow of something greater. That old covenant was between God and his people, and every single part of it pointed to Jesus. The reality is found in Christ. Your reality, your life is defined by and lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you. In him, you move and have your being. Your life is grounded in the fact that Jesus came into the world and accomplished salvation by living a life of perfect love. Into this love, God has drawn you by grace through his Word which has given you faith.

The writer of Hebrews builds a compelling case that you live in a new and infinitely more glorious covenant, one completely upheld and secured for you by Christ. This is a one-sided covenant. Through Christ, who is the fullness of the law and the love that completes it, the era of the new covenant has come, just as Scripture said. We live in the new covenant now because Jesus is the fulfillment of the law given through Moses and the promise made to Abraham. Jesus is the covenant. We know this from reading the Bible. We know it because God has placed his will and word in our hearts and written it on our minds. The Holy Spirit has been poured out—we are Pentecost people!

But don't rely on head knowledge! Stay in the Word to keep knowing better the best part of what Jeremiah declared and what Christ fulfilled, *"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more"* (**Hebrews 10:17**). What's better than that? Nothing. Because we are forgiven, who has it better than us? Nobody! God remembers our sins no more; our guilt, our failures, our rebellion are gone forever. This is the truest love, because as Paul says in **I Corinthians 13**, love keeps no record of wrongs. God loves us like no one else can. *"And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary"* (**Hebrews 10:18**). Jesus' one-time sacrifice, his body bearing our sin and his blood washing it away, has removed the need for any other. Nothing is required from us because everything required was given by Jesus. He is the all-sufficient sacrifice who reconciles the world to God.

We live in peace and can have hearts full of gratitude because Jesus allowed himself to be betrayed. Can you imagine?? He knew one of his closest friends would sell him out. He knew another would disown him three times. He knew the rest would flee. He knew the Father would turn away and forsake him leaving him utterly alone – naked, bleeding, in agony on the cross. With all this on his mind, he still graciously instituted us his Supper, the meal of the new covenant, where we receive his body and blood for our forgiveness and the assurance of life in heaven with him.

He, the Lamb of God, took our sin in himself and bore the full wrath of God in total isolation. Just hours before this, he got up from the table in that upper room, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed the feet of his sinful, betraying, deserting disciples. He showed them the most profound truth of the new covenant: the greatest among them is the servant of all. He gave them not a new command, but the old one fulfilled: *Love one another as I have loved you.* (**John 13:34**) By that love, all people would know they belonged to him. Love is the heartbeat of the new covenant. Live it. Love as one who knows the love of Christ and what it means for you. That's what the rest of this section of Hebrews is all about. The writer makes the natural Christian assumption that people who have been made holy by Jesus will live out that holiness. Live the new covenant! Don't just study it, read about it, discuss it, admire it from afar—live it!

Christ is your confidence. The writer of Hebrews continues, “*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,* ²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God...*” (**Hebrews 10:19–22a**) You can enter God's presence not with fear or timidity, but with confidence because you've been washed in Jesus' innocent blood. When Jesus gave up his life on the cross, the temple curtain was torn in two. God made it abundantly clear that the law's condemnation was dead and gone, and access to him was now flung wide open. Believing in Jesus is the new and living way to God mentioned here, it's very much apart from the law, the old covenant, it is always open.

Christ lives now, not resting but actively serving as your High Priest, constantly interceding for you before the Father. You can come to God, “*with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*” (**Hebrews 10:22b**) In baptism, you died with Christ and rose with him as a new creation. Or think of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would sprinkle blood on the Ark to cover the people's sins so that when God looked down, he saw atoning blood first, then the law which the people broke and he forgave them, he had mercy. Now Jesus, the great High Priest and the Lamb of God, has sprinkled his own blood over the covenant. When God looks at you, he sees Christ's righteousness first. And then, because of that, he sees you as his holy child!

Hold fast to that! Don't waver. Don't run after things of far lesser value, things that could never do in a million tries what Jesus has done once and perfectly. We do waver, of course. We can be faithless. But Christ never wavers, he is never faithless to us. He will never disown you because you are part of his body of which he is head, and he cannot disown himself.

As part of Jesus' body, listen to what the new covenant says about how to do life together, “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,* ²⁵ *not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” (**Hebrews 10:24–25**) This is how we live in the covenant of grace and peace: by encouraging and equipping each other with love, not guilt or pressure or browbeating, but grace. Really think about how you can move a brother or sister toward love and good deeds. Think about this for yourself, too! Give it serious contemplation. How can you help someone recognize the everyday opportunities to reflect the light of Christ? Don't rush your answer. Think about it. Consider how you can lovingly encourage someone to stay connected to Jesus through Word and Sacrament. Invite them into this meeting place of grace, not with guilt or shame, but with gentleness and grace. You are a new covenant person, after all! Live like it. Love like it.

We need God's grace always, and he gives it to us freely. As people living in the new covenant looking forward to the day of Jesus' return, let's share his grace with one another and proclaim his saving love to everyone. Amen.