

Hebrews

Chapter 8

Jesus, High Priest of a Better Covenant

How the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. 5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” 6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Ch 8 “We teach that the sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been enough for the sins of the whole world. There is no need for other sacrifices, as though Christ’s sacrifice were not enough for our sins. So people are justified not because of any other sacrifices, but because of this one sacrifice of Christ, if they believe that they have been redeemed by this sacrifice. So they are called priests, not in order to make any sacrifices for the people as in the Law, that by these they may merit forgiveness of sins for the people. Rather, they are called to teach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to the people. Nor do we have another priesthood like the Levitical, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches well enough” (Ap XIII 8–10). (TLSB)

8:1–10:39 The argument of this section grows out of an exposition of Jer 31:31–34 and demonstrates that Christ is the mediator of a “better covenant” (7:22). (CSB)

8:1 *seated at the right hand.* Christ ascended to reign and exercises full divine power according to His human nature. (TLSB)

the Majesty in heaven. A Jewish expression for God (see 1:3). (CSB)

God the Father. (TLSB)

heaven. The dwelling of God; not the sky or a merely physical location (cf Eph 4:10). (TLSB)

8:2 *minister.* Gk *leitourgos*, an official assistant or minister. Here, one who performs a priestly ministry. (TLSB)

in the holy places. Or, “of the holy things.” (TLSB)

true tent. In contrast to the tabernacle erected by Moses, which was an imperfect and impermanent copy of the heavenly one. (CSB)

Heaven, which Christ entered after He rose from the dead. (TLSB)

that the Lord set up, not man. The heavenly sanctuary built by God corresponds to the Most Holy Place, the innermost sanctuary in Moses’ tabernacle, into which the high priest briefly entered with the blood of atonement once a year (see Lev 16:13–15, 34). In the heavenly sanctuary, however, our great high priest dwells eternally as our intercessor (7:25). (CSB)

8:3 *gifts and sacrifices.* Cf Lv 9:6–7, 22. Just as the OT high priests offered animal sacrifices to God, Christ fulfilled His priestly ministry by offering His body on the cross. He then distributes the benefits of His sacrifice and intercedes for us. (TLSB)

8:4 *he would not be a priest.* By his human birth Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, which was not the priestly tribe (see 7:12–14). (CSB)

Because He was not from the priestly tribe of Levi. (TLSB)

priests who offer the gifts. Members of the tribe of Levi. The present tense of the verb “offer,” here and elsewhere in the letter, indicates that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. This letter, therefore, must have been written prior to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70. (CSB)

8:5 *a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.* The heavenly reality is the sanctuary of God’s presence, into which Christ our high priest entered with his own blood (see 9:11–12). (CSB)

OT tabernacle foreshadowed Christ’s person and work. See notes, 10:1; Col 2:17. *heavenly things.* John Chrysostom: “What are the heavenly things he speaks of here? The spiritual things. For although they are done on earth, yet nevertheless they are worthy of the Heavens. For when our Lord Jesus Christ lies slain [as a sacrifice (cf 10:12)], when the Spirit is with us, when He who sits on the right hand of the Father is here, when sons are made by the Washing ... how can all these be other than ‘heavenly things’?” (NPNF 1 14:434). (TLSB)

make everything according to the pattern. Because both the tabernacle and its ministry were intended to illustrate symbolically the only way sinners may approach a holy God and find forgiveness. (CSB)

8:6 *the covenant of which he is mediator is superior.* See 9:15; 12:24; 1Ti 2:5. The new covenant (see vv. 8–12; Jer 31:31–34) that Jesus mediates is superior to the covenant God made through Moses at Sinai (see Ex 24:7–8). (CSB)

enacted on better promises. See vv. 10–12. (CSB)

Forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who repent and believe in Christ (cf vv 8–12). (TLSB)

8:7 *if the first covenant had been faultless.* The line of argument here is similar to that in 7:11, where the Levitical priestly order is shown to be inferior because it was replaced by the order of Melchizedek. Similarly, if the Mosaic covenant were without defect, there would have been no need to replace it with a

new covenant. Concerning the fact that there was nothing essentially “wrong” with the Mosaic covenant see note on 7:18. (CSB)

The old covenant’s limitations anticipated perfection in Christ’s work. (TLSB)

8:8–12 A quotation from Jer 31:31–34 containing a prophetic announcement and definition of the new covenant, which was to be different from the Mosaic covenant (v. 9). Its superior benefits are: (1) God’s laws will become inner principles (v. 10a) that enable his people to delight in doing his will (cf. Eze 36:26–27; Ro 8:2–4); (2) God and his people will have intimate fellowship (v. 10b); (3) sinful ignorance of God will be removed forever (v. 11); and (4) forgiveness of sins will be an everlasting reality (v. 12). (CSB)

8:8 *establish a new covenant.* The promise of the Gospel had been with humanity since Gn 3. At the cross, it would be put into effect. (TLSB)

8:9 The old covenant, despite being given in the miraculous time of the exodus, was not kept by Israel. (TLSB)

8:10 *laws into their minds ... hearts.* Renewal or sanctification. Luth: “To be in the mind means to be understood; to be in the heart means to be loved” (AE 29:198). (TLSB)

I will be their God. The adoption of sinful humans to be God’s people. Luther: “This light of understanding in the mind, I say, and this flame in the heart is the law of faith, the new law, the law of Christ, the law of the Spirit, the law of grace. It justifies, fulfills everything, and crucifies the lusts of the flesh. Thus St. Augustine says beautifully on this passage: ‘In a sense the man who with a love of righteousness lives righteously lives the Law itself’ ” (AE 27:234). (TLSB)

8:11 *they shall all know Me.* The saving knowledge of God and the Spirit’s gifts will become much clearer. Many more nations will know God. On the Last Day, all people will see the Lord, some with joy, but others with weeping (1Co 13:12; Mt 13:41–42). (TLSB)

8:12 *For I will be merciful.* People will grow in knowledge of God to receive His mercy for Christ’s sake. (TLSB)

8:13 *first one obsolete.* The announcement of the new covenant clearly proved the impermanence of the one already in existence. To return to the old system would be to return to what is no longer valid or effective. (CSB)

The first covenant is a shadow of the second and fades in the brightness of Christ’s new work. (TLSB)

Ch 8 The old covenant, because it could not permanently address the problem of sin, would “vanish away.” As Priest, Christ came to establish an everlasting covenant and atonement for our sins. • O merciful God, forgive us our sins for the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice. Amen. (TLSB)