

Introduction:

A. I have an old friend, a solid and wonderful Christian brother, who has been very influenced by a Bible teacher that says Christians should never confess our sins because the Bible is clear that our sins are forgiven and forgotten. He thinks that to confess sins is a subtle way of denying the gift of God. You can see his point. But I can't live like that. I can know God has forgiven my sin but something within me still needs to make things right, to be restored.

I have another friend, a pastor, who told me he has started a Bible class by saying, “*A Christian should never feel guilty.*” He knows he's being provocative, but he gets people thinking. My friend is a great lover of the book of Hebrews, and he was thinking about our text today. He doesn't mean that Christians should never feel convicted about sins they've committed or that we can sin so God can show more grace. He told me, “*When we sin, we want to run and hide but Christ has said, 'Come to me! This is the first place you should go!' Guilt keeps us from coming to God, from persevering in our faith.* But Jesus says, ‘*Don't run away. Come to the throne of grace and I'll meet you there!*’” That is the message of our text today, Heb. 8-9. Please turn there.

B. Two weeks ago in Heb. 6-7 we were taught that Jesus is a high priest from an entirely better order than the priests of the OT. Unlike them, he lives forever and, having been human and suffered the severest temptation, he can empathize with us in our weakness. That brings us to **Heb. 8:1-2...**

C. In the OT, so familiar to the audience of Hebrews, God gave Israel a covenant of his love, a tabernacle where they could worship him, and a priesthood to serve God on their behalf with sacrifices and gifts. But all those gifts proved inadequate to produce a holy people—people who loved and obeyed God and thus lived in the rich peace of the God-blessed life. So **Heb. 8:6-13...**

D. The new covenant God promised through Jeremiah didn't actually come into being for 600 more years. What was the problem? What was God waiting for? A covenant needs a mediator. God was waiting to send the mediator.

I. JESUS IS THE MEDIATOR OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT WITH US

A. We think of a mediator as someone who brings warring parties to some kind of agreement, but that's not its only meaning. *Illus.*: I'm a mediator, you know. I've done it close to 60 times in the last 20 years. I listen to two people make vows to one another and exchange rings, and then I say, "I pronounce you husband and wife." Then I go in my office and I sign the marriage license and send it to the courthouse. Without me saying so and signing my name, they're not married. I'm their mediator. I vouch for their vows to the witnesses and to the state, and in turn proclaim on behalf of the Lord and the state that they are wed.

Heb. 9:20 reminds us that when the first covenant was established at the foot of Mt. Sinai, a bull was killed and its blood sprinkled on altar and people alike, and all the people promised to keep God's laws. Moses the mediator said, "*This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.*" Ex 24:8 But they failed.

B. God's new covenant required a better mediator and better promises. Let's look first at the better promises in the new covenant, in **Heb. 8:10-12**, quoting Jer. 31...

1. "*I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.*" Israelites could memorize God's words but God spiritually inscribes his word on the hearts of Christians. We gradually take on "the mind of Christ." This happens because the Holy Spirit of God lives in us and gives us his inward sense of right and wrong, but more than that, an inward understanding of who God is and how he works, of his promises and blessings.
2. "*I will be their God, and they will be my people.*" Moses told Israel these things, too, but they knew it externally. Kind of like the way I know I'm Swedish by background, but I have no idea what it would be like to

think like a Swede. Thanks to Jesus, we all have a deep inward sense that “I am his and he is mine.”

3. *“No longer will they teach their neighbor or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”* In a sense, in the OT, God’s prophets had to continually evangelize God’s people. They had to be told again and again that the Lord is *“gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”* Some certainly believed that but it wasn’t second nature to them. But now, we don’t have to tell that to each other. Imagine if I told you all to stand and say to your neighbor, *“You should know the Lord.”* More than likely your neighbor would look at you a little strangely and say, *“I do. I already know the Lord. You don’t have to tell me that.”* We don’t have to keep evangelizing each other!
 4. *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* God forgave sins in the OT, with the eventual sacrifice of Christ in view. But for many of those who made a covenant with God, sin was their undoing. *“They did not remain faithful to my covenant,”* God said. And he couldn’t forgive nor forget that. But now, for those who know Christ, *“every debt that you ever had is paid up in full by the grace of the Lord.”* *“Jesus paid it all.”*
- C. But all those wonderful covenant promises needed a mediator to put them into force, to seal the covenant. Jesus is that better mediator. Whereas the OT priests moved through the tabernacle to approach God, the *real* sanctuary of God is in heaven, and that is where Jesus mediated the new covenant. As our high priest, risen and reigning in heaven, Jesus entered by his own blood, shed on the cross, as a sacrifice for our sin, *“to appear for us in God’s presence”* 9:24. So listen to **Heb. 9:11-15...**

Illus.: Pastor and author Steve Brown writes about counseling a woman who confessed to him that she’d had an affair 20 years before. He was the first person she’d ever told. She’d never told

her husband and it haunted her. Finally, they decided, with considerable trepidation, that she would tell her husband, that he seemed to be the kind of man who might be able to handle it. Steve Brown writes,

I saw her the next day, and she looked fifteen years younger. "What happened?" I asked. "When I told him," she exclaimed, "he replied that he had known about the incident for twenty years and was just waiting for me to tell him so he could tell me how much he loved me!" And then she started to laugh. "He forgave me twenty years ago, and I've been needlessly carrying all this guilt for all these years!"

[PT.com; from *When Being Good Isn't Enough*, pp.10-11]

Her sin had been forgiven long before but her conscience wasn't cleansed. How do you imagine that forgiveness *and her clear conscience* changed their marriage?

With that in mind, let's look closer at that phrase in **v.14**, "*...the blood of Christ...will cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*" Contrast that with **9:9**, "*the gifts and sacrifices being offered [by OT priests in the tabernacle] were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.*" Those sacrifices were what God required. They were often offered in genuine faith that God would forgive. And he did, for Christ's sake. But they couldn't change people *inwardly* any more than the blood from a sacrificed animal sprinkled on them could make them truly clean. They were forgiven but they were still burdened by guilt, and as a result they did not serve God. In fact, many rebelled against God.

Even when they were repentant, the high priest of Israel only entered God's sanctuary in the tabernacle once a year to offer a sacrifice for the sin of the people, and that was only to atone for sins they had not committed *deliberately*. So the effect was a kind of accumulating guiltiness. **A people always thirsty for grace.**

When we put our faith in Christ, he not only satisfies God's justice but he also washes our consciences clean. He washes away the heaviness, the guiltiness. How often have you heard new Christians say how *clean* they feel? It's one thing to clear God's indictment against us. It is another to clear our inward indictment of ourselves. Jesus does both. And that frees us to serve God.

II. THANKS TO JESUS WE CAN NOW SERVE THE LIVING GOD WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

A. Remember the “better promises” of the new covenant?

God’s law written on your heart, the inward assurance that “I am his and he is mine,” really *knowing* God inwardly—the gracious and compassionate Lord, slow to anger and abounding in love.” And the promise that, for Jesus’ sake, God will forgive and forget all our wickedness. Those covenant promises are intended to wash over your conscience like the waters of baptism, like a spring shower.
But we need to go to Jesus!

Illus.: Sometimes when I sin I go to God pretty quickly to clear things up but there have certainly been dark times when I didn’t want to face God because I felt so guilty—really grubby and nasty, times when I was so ashamed I didn’t even want to face myself, let alone God. In times like that I don’t even what to *think* about God. I don’t want to *think* about spiritual, biblical things at all. That’s tough for any Christian but it puts the pastor in a special bind, because Sunday’s comin’! So I keep busy. I try to be extra nice. I make resolutions. But what I don’t want to do, honestly, is to read my Bible. I don’t want to pray. And I don’t look forward to worship.

When I finally creep into God’s presence, hoping maybe that he’s busy with someone else, I expect that God will be as disgusted with me as I am. It is difficult to describe those times, because they aren’t always the same, and they’re inward and private. But I can tell you that more often than not I’m met by a surprising sense (if I can put it this way) **that God is so happy to see me.** That he is glad I’m there. I remember vividly times when—to my complete surprise—I felt God’s smile, his happy welcome.

I think often of the story of the prodigal son, and that line where Jesus says that the father saw the son “*a long way off*” and “*was filled with compassion for him.*”

Compassion! Because, whatever else that boy had done, whatever else he was, he was his son, damaged and done-in and he had come home. And God has met me like that, too.

When our consciences aren't clean our instinct is to hide from God, the way Adam and Eve did when they sinned. Hide and blame and rationalize. But when we do that our hearts don't heal and the lies only get louder. **What this passage tells us is that when we sin, when we feel weak and worthless, don't run away from God. Run to him. Run to Jesus to be washed.** Your sin is already forgiven and forgotten and Jesus doesn't want you to wallow in that guilt so come and bathe in grace.

- B. If our conscience is clear and our covenant privileges wash over us—well, then we want to serve the living God. We want to sing and worship. We want to read our Bibles and pray. We want to love God's people. We want to be good. We want to be faithful till God calls us home.
- C. Finally, look at **Heb. 9:27-28**, *“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”* Jesus does two things for us, one in his first coming and the other when he comes again.
1. “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many.” By taking away our sin, and by mediating the new covenant, he has brought us into a covenant relationship with himself he happily calls a marriage, rich with all those covenant privileges. That is where we are right now. Then...
 2. “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Our salvation is bought and paid for. We already experience those great privileges of the new covenant, but we are people who have not yet come into all that God has promised. We are still **waiting** to see Jesus. We are still **waiting** for our new bodies. We are still **waiting** to become perfected like Jesus. We are still **waiting** for reunions and to meet our vast family of God. We are still **waiting** lay faith aside for good and finally see. We are still **waiting** for our first glimpse of home.

Philip Yancey writes, *“I know a woman whose grandmother lies buried under 150-year-old live oak trees in the cemetery of an Episcopal church in rural Louisiana. In accordance with the grandmother’s instructions, only one word is carved on the tombstone: ‘Waiting.’”* [#3398]