

**Written on the Heart**

Hebrews 8:6-13

80-286

When we come to a time around the Lord's table such as this, our...our minds are drawn to those themes of Scripture which relate to the cross and to our salvation. And in all the years that I've been here, of course, I've preached hundreds and hundreds of messages around the Lord's table, and yet have come nowhere close to exhausting all the possibilities of understanding the glories of the cross. This morning, I wanna draw your attention to Hebrews chapter 8. Hebrews chapter 8.

When I'm here week in and week out, I am focused on the very small details of the text and working through the exposition of every text. But typically, when I go away, and I think maybe in broader terms, and I get away from the daily kind of discipline of the text, and I begin to think about big themes. I come back with maybe a...a sort of more general approach to the Biblical truth. And I hope it's helpful for you this morning, because that's exactly what I wanna do.

But I wanna base it on the 8th chapter of Hebrews and a...a text that I will not deal with in detail, but at least it contains some of the key elements that I wanna present to you. Starting in verse 6 of Hebrews chapter 8. And, here, the writer of Hebrews says, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises...Then...For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, 'Behold, days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for 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 into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember sins no more.' When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."

Now, when we come to the Lord's table, we come here to remember the new covenant. The new covenant in Christ's blood. The better covenant enacted on better promises that replaced the first covenant that was obviously not faultless, or there would have been no occasion for a second, as the writer says. The first covenant was obsolete and disappeared. We come to celebrate the new covenant in Christ's blood. Christ shed His blood to provide forgiveness for all the sins of those who repent and believe the Gospel. And we celebrate that salvation through the work of Christ on the cross.

Now a covenant is a promise. And the new covenant is God's promise to forgive the sins of those

who trust in Christ. That's what it is. God promises to forgive our sins and give us eternal life and the glory of Heaven forever if we trust in His Son as our Savior and sacrifice for sins. The new covenant, which is God's promise to forgive sin, is ratified by the blood of Christ on the cross. So we come to the cross as the point at which Jesus ratified the promise of God to forgive sin. God could have desired to forgive sin, but without the cross, there would have been no way for Him to forgive, because sin has to be punished. But when Christ was punished, God was free to forgive the sinner who repents and embraces Christ.

So we come to this table to celebrate a better covenant, a new covenant that replaces the old one. Our joy, however, I think, and our gratitude, and the degree of our celebration is dependent on something. And it isn't just dependent on the cross. We all know the story of the cross. It isn't just dependent on understanding grace or mercy or God's love demonstrated in the gift of Jesus Christ. Our real joy and gratitude for the cross is dependent on our understanding of the law of God and how we have violated it. It is dependent upon our understanding of the law of God and how we have violated. Simply put, you cannot understand how great your forgiveness is unless you understand how deep your guilt was. You cannot enjoy what God has done for you to deliver you, unless you understand the condemnation in which you existed.

So coming to the Lord's table for a true believer is not just a time of gratitude for the cross. It's not that thin. It's not that superficial. It's not just saying, "Thank You, Jesus, for dying for my sins," and leaving it at that. We come to the Lord's table, not just with an attitude of joy and thankfulness over the cross, but we come with a sense of sadness and sorrow, burdened by the weight of our sins and the violations of the law of God. It is important, then, for us, as we come to the Lord's table today, to...to be in a communion attitude. To understand to some degree the law and how we have violated it, and how God has dealt with those violations. And that's what I wanna talk to you about.

In our contemporary evangelical culture, the law is rarely talked about. More rarely written about. Preached about. Sinners, even, are asked to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation with no reference to the law of God that they have violated. Little, if any, reference to the guilt and condemnation in which they stand for those violations. Sinners are simply asked to pray a prayer and believe in Jesus and that's it. Law is not a feature in our modern evangelism, and, consequently, we have a deficient Gospel and deficient converts.

But it is also true that the law of God is rarely discussed among Christians. We are OD'd on grace. We don't talk about the law of God. But the law is at the heart of salvation, and it's the heart of sanctification...A nonbeliever must understand that he has lived an entire life in violation of the law of God for which he is personally guilty and deserves eternal torment. And the believer must understand that, though forgiven and promised eternal life, sin is still a breach of the law of God, which not only disturbs God, but should deeply disturb our own souls.

Now some people are gonna say, "Well, we're not under the law. We're under grace. Why do we have to deal with the law? Isn't the law obsolete? Doesn't verse 13 say that? That because there's a new covenant, He's made the first obsolete? And as verse 5 says, isn't the law just a shadow, or just a copy of heavenly things? And now we have substance?" It's important to understand the role of the law, and to understand whether the law, in fact, is obsolete. Now, lemme see if I can't clarify that for you. The old covenant has passed away. The old covenant is obsolete. The old covenant was a shadow. The old covenant contained the law of God, but was not equal to the law of God. The old covenant was the Mosaic law. It had the moral law of God, which is a reflection of God's holy nature,

which never changes, because God never changes. But it also contained social stipulations, ceremonial observances, which passed away, because they were only temporary for purposes fulfilled in the past.

The old covenant, that stage of the law, that form of the law, that embodiment of the law, that sort of container of the moral law of God, is obsolete. The moral law of God will never be obsolete...because the moral law of God is simply a reflection of His nature. And He is immutable and unchanging and His nature's always the same. And that which pleases Him, always pleases Him, and that which displeases Him, always displeases Him, and there never will be any alteration of that.

It is important to understand that the law of God never passes away. It always is what God desires, what God wants, and always what His creatures should render to Him as obedience to that law. It is critical for us to know the law of God and to obey it. What is obsolete is not the moral law of God, but the embodiment of that law in the Mosaic economy.

Now, for my purpose today, I wanna show you the role of the law in redemptive history. To give you an overview so you understand its role in our lives today. I want you to have the big picture. The holy law of God never changes, because God never changes, and God's laws are merely a manifestation of His holy nature. But the stages and the forms in which God reveals that law have changed and changed dramatically.

Sinclair Ferguson, my friend, certainly an unwilling dispensationalist...says, "God designed the role of the law in a series of unique stages." And he's right. And he says, "Stage one was before the Fall. Stage two was the law at Sinai. And stage three is in Christ and the new covenant." The law never changes, but the forms change. The embodiment of that law changes. And reluctant as he and other reform theologians may be to accept the implications of this idea of stages of the law, it is true that God revealed His holy will in different forms, in different stages. If you will, in different administrations or different dispensations.

Before the Fall, for example, in the perfect Garden of Eden, where there was no sin, lived Adam. Adam was a pure reflection of the law of God. There was no written law in the Garden, right? Adam didn't have a book. He didn't have tablets of stone. He didn't have a scroll. There's no indication in Genesis that God gave him a long list of things to do verbally. There was no need for a written law, because the law of God was written where? On his heart. Because Adam was created in the image of God, and before the Fall, the image was uncorrupted, the most natural thing for Adam to do was imitate God. He imitated God naturally. God's holy law dominated his mind. God's holy law produced only that behavior, that conversation, and those thoughts that fully pleased God. God could say about Adam, "He is holy, harmless, and undefiled." God could say about Adam, "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Because God had written His law on Adam's heart. But Adam had the potentiality to sin, and that potentiality became reality.

After the Fall, you say was the law of God still on the heart? In a measure. In a measure. Romans chapter 2 says, "God has written His law on the heart of every man," but the problem is it's diminished. It's covered. It's dominated by another factor, and that is sin. After the Fall, man's heart was darkened by evil, and what is natural to man now is what? Sin. Not righteousness. The most natural expression of human behavior, thought, and speech is evil. There is buried down there in the residual image of God in man a knowledge of God's moral law, which is totally dominated and overpowered by evil. And so man did not naturally obey God's law. He couldn't even find it, as it

were, tucked down in the recesses of his being, even though he's responsible for it...And so God had to write His law again, and this time He wrote it in stone. And there on Mount Sinai, God wrote the law on tablets of stone, and the accompanying revelation of that law that we know as the Mosaic covenant. Not on the heart this time, but on stone. And not positive. In Adam, it had been positive. The law of God was written there. There were no restraints and restrictions and threats, except one isolated warning about a Tree of Life and not to eat of it. Everything else was positive, because it was natural for Adam to live in imitation of the holiness of God...

But, now, when the law was written in stone, it was negative. It threatened and threatened and threatened and promised death and destruction and damnation and judgment. So first written on the heart, and then written on stone. And God chose another son. The first son of His Creation was Adam, and he wrote the law on his heart. And the next son of His Creation is the son that He called out of Egypt, Israel. And to that son, Israel, a people, but nonetheless, His son in a broad sense. God gave His written law.

But this son, Israel, like everybody else, experienced only the dominating power of sin. The heart is black. The soul is dead. The eyes are blind. The ears are deaf. The mind cannot understand, and man can only do evil. After the Fall, you remember, God looked at the world and said, "They're only doing evil continually," and drowned the whole human race with the exception of eight people. Evil became normal. Evil became natural, because the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And no man can do what is right. There is none righteous, no, not one. So men no longer imitated God naturally. God wrote down His law then to tell them of every single violation, even though they wouldn't have known about it until then. They were still being held guilty for it. They were still dying. They were still going to hell. And God gave them the moral law, which they were violating. And after He gave the law, they continued to violate it.

You read the history of Israel. If you're reading through the Bible with us, you read it again and again and again. They did evil. They did evil. They did evil. They did evil. They did. Because that's all they could do.

Obedience for the fallen is unnatural. It's alien. It's foreign. It's impossible. And the old covenant did absolutely nothing to write the law on the heart. It only wrote the law on cold, hard stone. Stone that crushed them. Threatening them with death and damnation. And the written law still does that. It still does that...By that external form, no flesh can know God. No soul can be justified by the law. The law is just a...a tutor to lead you to Christ. The law came so that transgression might be manifest. "The law came...Paul says...and I thought was alive, and then I saw the law of God, and I died. It killed me." That form of the law was insufficient.

So the first stage of the law written on the heart of Adam was only for a brief time. The second stage of the law written on stone was only for a brief time. And you have to come to the next stage of the law. Again, Sinclair Ferguson says, "The form the law took in the Mosaic covenant was never intended to be permanent. In its very nature, the Mosaic administration was as collapsible as the tabernacle." And he's right. It was just for a time, and then it was obsolete. Its purpose, to show Israel how sinful they were. To lay out every moral demand that God had in specifics, so that they could see how wretched they were, and desperately in need of another covenant that could write the law of God on their hearts as it has once been in Adam's heart. The law couldn't do that. And so the law was replaced.

The next stage is Christ. And this is remarkable to understand. The next stage of the revealed law appears in Christ. Say what do you mean by that? Jesus Christ was the embodiment of the law of God. He lived the law of God perfectly. In fact, He was a better example of the law than the written law. Clearly, He was a more understandable, a more comprehensible, a more vivid demonstration of God's holiness than the written law. In Him, the law of God was lived out in perfection. It wasn't just a written law about what you say and about what you do and about how you think. It was a thinking, speaking, acting, living illustration of perfect divine holiness. That was what was seen in Christ.

In fact, in Matthew 5:7, it says He came to fulfill the law. In Matthew 3:15, He says that He had to fulfill all righteousness. He was the law personified. The third phase. And that, because it was written in His heart, unhindered, unfettered, uncorrupted. He, God, in human flesh, lived the perfect law of God before man. Every divine precept was manifest in Him. Perfect obedience, flawless, sinless. And so man had the supreme revelation of the law of God. Moses came down from an earthly mount to bring the law in stone...which neither he nor anyone else could obey perfectly. And Moses had a reflection of God's glory. It was only reflective, and it faded away.

On the other hand, Jesus came down from the heavenly mount to bring the law in flesh, which He obeyed perfectly. And His was an enduring glory, unreflected and unfading. And that's why the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." So if you wanna see the law of God, you don't look at the Mosaic law. You look at Christ. There it is in absolute perfection lived. And Jesus even raises the standard. He even elevates the standard. Doesn't change the law of God. It can't be changed, but He raises our understanding of what's intended by it, and He did that in the Sermon on the Mount at the very outset of His ministry when He said this, "You have heard it said. You have heard it said. You have heard it said, but I say. But I say. But I say." And what was He doing? He was taking the law inside, wasn't He? "You've heard it said don't murder. I'm telling you don't hate. You've heard it said don't commit adultery. I'm saying if you look on a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart." And Jesus was giving them not a...a law in simple written form, but a law in living reality.

But, even so, even though Jesus was a better example of law, He was purer, clearer, more dynamic manifestation and embodiment of the law of God, a better pattern to follow, that didn't help either...because we can't follow His life. We can't live the way He lived. To have a perfect example may make the law more clear, but that only makes us more guilty. Right? You know, those Jews living under the Old Testament law, they tolerated the law. They didn't try to obliterate the law. They adjusted it. They tweaked it. They changed it. They altered it. They amended it. They added to it. Took away from it. Massaged it. Manipulated it, and got it into a comfortable zone. And then they credited themselves for keeping it. Right? This was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

And then Jesus came along and just obliterated their comfort zone. "Do you think you're keeping the law? You're not. If you're gonna enter into God's Kingdom, you're gonna have to have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees...You're gonna have to be as perfect as God in Heaven is perfect, and I'm gonna redefine your idea of perfect. It's not about not killing, it's about not hating also. It's not about not committing adultery, it's about not thinking about it." And He went on from there. And He was more intimidating. They could tolerate and tweak the written law. They couldn't tolerate and tweak Jesus, so they killed Him. Too intimidating. Too confrontive.

The perfection of Christ was more disturbing, more distressing, more intimidating. His perfection

forced on everyone, and it forces on us, a higher view of the law than we could ever know by reading the Old Testament. He defines the true view of obedience, holiness, and righteousness. And He is so disturbing...in His holy obedience to God that He intimidates the superficial legalists to the point that they...they want Him dead.

Either Jesus makes you repent, or He makes you angry. See, that's why our society today doesn't want Jesus in the public discourse. No, they want a watered-down, washed-out sort of nice guy Jesus, but they don't want the Jesus of the Bible. They don't want the Bible. They don't want the Jesus of the New Testament, because He's even more intimidating than the Mosaic law. Our culture doesn't want the Mosaic law imposed upon them. Our culture doesn't want us holding them to Old Testament morality. But they would sooner take that than they would take Jesus...So the embodiment of the law in its third stage comes in Jesus. And this is the purest, noblest, and perfect revelation of the law.

But the reality is a perfect example is useless to us, because we not only can't keep Moses' law, we can't live like Jesus. What hope do we have then for fellowship with God? How are we ever gonna get back somewhere near where Adam once was before he fell? Well, the answer then comes in the cross, doesn't it? Because notice in this new covenant text, and you see in...in Hebrews 8, back to our text, if you have a Bible that shows Old Testament passages set apart sometimes in capital letters, this is taken out of a new covenant text of Jeremiah 31. And there, the new covenant is promised. And I want you to notice the character of this covenant by looking at verse 10.

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord...Here's the difference...I will put My laws into their minds. I will write them upon their hearts." This is what has to happen. Having the law written outside of us, having the law lived perfectly outside of us doesn't help us. How do we get it written on our hearts? Well, that's the new covenant, and Jesus comes to His disciples in the upper room, and He said, "I'm gonna shed My blood, and it's the blood of a new covenant." On the cross, Jesus dies. He ratifies the new covenant, which makes the new covenant effective, because He bears the sins of all who will ever believe. And God then can forgive our sins, transform us, and write His law on our hearts.

Down in verse 12 is that other dimension. "I will be merciful to their iniquities. I will remember their sins no more." The new covenant has two elements. The forgiveness of all our sins, and the writing of the law of God on our hearts. And it all works through the cross. As Jesus goes to the cross and pays the penalty for our sins, God forgives us, and then regenerates us. That is, He writes His law on our new hearts. We have a new mind, a new heart, a new love for God's law.

What is it that characterizes a Christian then? He has this that Adam had. He delights in the law of God. He loves the law of God. All of a sudden now, it becomes natural to him. Natural in a supernatural sense. It becomes natural to him to obey the law of God. This is defining a believer. Someone who is a new covenant believer, and there are no other kind, is someone who now has God's law written on the mind and heart. That is to say he loves the law of God, delights in the law of God, understands the law of God, does not rebel against the law of God, does not resist the law of God in his inner man. The law in Adam's heart was loved and...and obeyed and delighted in until he sinned. The law in Moses' stone, however, was a burden and produced guilt and shame and rebellion. The law in Christ's life, perfect obedience. And yet His perfection is offensive to sinners. It's intimidating. It's indicting. And the more sinful a culture becomes, the more it hates the sinlessness of Christ. So we can't live up to the law of Moses. We can't live up to the example of Christ. We can't

live like Adam lived before the Fall, because we're all corrupted. But we can come to the cross. We can come to Christ and accept His new covenant sacrifice for our sins.

And then, all of a sudden, sin yields its control, and sin no longer has dominion over us. But the law of God dominates us. Oh, we still sin, because this new creation that loves the law of God is incarcerated in our physical, unredeemed humanness. But it is still characteristic of a Christian to love the law of God. David, Psalm 119:97, "O, how I love Your law!" It was his delight. The Apostle Paul, "The law is holy, just, and good, and I see in me a...a principle, a law working, and it's righteous, and it's good. But there's another principle in me, and the things I wanna do, I don't do. And the things I don't wanna do, I do. O, wretched man that I am." And he understood the battle of having a soul, a transformed inner person that loves the law of God and delights in it, and unredeemed flesh that still loves sin.

But the heart has been changed in a Christian. If you ask me what is characteristic of a Christian? What is it that makes the difference? It is this. New covenant defines all Christians. They have received the promise of God, which involves the forgiveness of sin and the writing of the law of God in their new hearts. That's why people sometimes say to me, "You know, you preach so strongly. You preach Biblically. You...you preach all these kinds of things. Don't people get offended at this?"

You know, on one hand, nonbelievers might get offended, but until they're severely offended, they'll never repent and believe, right? So you have to offend those people. On the other hand, Christians never get offended at the law of God, because they love it, because they delight in it. And if you rebel against what it is that God wants you to do, if the purest and truest expression of your heart is to hate and resist and rebel that, then you don't have the love of the law, and it's not written in your heart. But if you, like a true believer, are saying, "I love the law of God. I delight in that law. It is written in my heart. It is what I long to do. It is the truest expression of my desire. And, yet, I struggle and stumble and fail because of sin, and I long for the glory of Heaven." Then you understand what it is to be a Christian.

So the law today is written on the heart. And, truthfully, I don't need to go run back to the Mosaic law, in one sense, to know what to do. I understand God's law written in my heart. Even when I read it in Scripture, it's not like, "Oh, you mean I can't do that? I didn't know that." There's something in me that the Spirit of God has written on my heart that knows what is right. And for my model, I don't go to the Mosaic law. To whom do I go? I go to Christ, right? That's why Paul equated sanctification, not with mastering the Mosaic law, but with becoming like whom? Like Christ. Like Christ. Paul says, "That I may know Him. That I may know Him. That I may know Him." Because there is the model of the law...lived.

To be like Christ. "O, to be like Thee, dear Jesus, my plea, just to know Thou art formed fully in me." That's what Paul prayed for the Galatians, that Christ would be fully formed in them. The...the prize of the upward call is Christ likeness. Paul says, "That's...that's the goal for which I pursue." So we have God's law written in our hearts. The Spirit of God convicting us, driving us toward Christ likeness.

There's the final stage for the law, and it's greater than any of these. The law was first embodied in Adam, and then it was embodied in the Mosaic structure, and then it was embodied in Christ. But the final stage for the law, as far as we're concerned, will be greater than any other. It will be embodied in us in perfection. Not in this life, but in the life to come. We'll not only obey from the heart, but with

our glorified bodies. We will live in limitless and absolute perfection. Now when you think about the Bible talks about, "You'll be like Him, for you see Him as He is," all those passages that tell us we're gonna be like Christ. And there are many of them. We're gonna have a body like unto His body. We're gonna be transformed, 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 8, we're gonna be conformed to the image of His Son; 1 John 2:28 to 3:3, we'll be made like Christ. It's not that we're gonna have His nose and His ears and His mouth. It's not that. It's that we're gonna have His adherence to the holy law of God.

What is Heaven? Heaven is gonna be perfect obedience forever, which means perfect joy, which means perfect delight, which means perfect fulfillment. All that God ever intended in the original Creation to give to man created in His image, multiplied in the glories of our eternal existence. What is truest about Heaven is that the law of God will be written on your hearts as it is now, but unhindered, unrestrained, uncorrupted.

So the law never changes. We'll spend forever obeying the law, and I don't think you'll have to run to the library to see what the rules are, if there is a heavenly library. I can't imagine why there would be one, since we'll know as we're known. We're not gonna need some information. There aren't gonna be commands posted all around the New Jerusalem. Not gonna be reminders of obedience, because it's gonna be the truest and purest expression of who you are. That's what Christ likeness is. It's not about the outside, except that your body will be a glorified body like His. It's about the inside. It's about Christ likeness in the sense of eternal holy perfection.

This is only possible because of the cross. If we were left to be condemned to look at the example of Adam and what a sad story that is, at the example of the Mosaic law. What a sad story that is. And the example of Christ, and what a sad story that is. They killed Christ, and He still intimidates sinners with His holiness. And we would be among the intimidated were it not for the cross. Wherein He dies to pay the penalty for our sins, and in the new covenant sacrifice of Christ, we receive forgiveness and a new heart and a new love for His law. And this is only a foretaste of the glory to come when we will, loving that law, delighting in that law, keep that law perfectly forever in the glory of Heaven. And all of this is made possible because of the cross.

Father, now as we come to this table to close our service today, we...we are stunned at Your grace. You would have every reason to crush us for our violations of Your law. Every righteous and holy reason to punish us forever in hell. But You have sought to redeem us in a most amazing way by sending Your own Son to bear the punishment for our horrendous violations of Your law, which still go on as long as we live in this world. You have given us a Savior and a sacrifice, so that someday...we will keep Your law perfectly forever. Not like Adam...who...kept Your law, but had the potential to sin. We will keep Your law without the potential for sin ever. Sin having forever been destroyed. But until then, Lord, we come to Your table sorrowful, for we, again, have lost that battle, loving Your law. Knowing it's written in our hearts, we yet violate it. And we come again need Your cleansing and Your washing. Help us now to confess our sins and to acknowledge the violations of Your holy law and all that did not please You and ask that You would wash us...as we think to the cross.

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