

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 25 January 6, 2019 Our Covenant Mediator Hebrews 9:15-17

The Mediator

v. 15

Verse 15 is critical, and the rest of chapter 9 explains why, so we will focus on v. 15 for awhile. *“Therefore he is the Mediator of a new covenant...”*. Note: not “will be” but “is”. Back in 7:22, we were told that *“This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.”*, and in 8:6, *“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.”*

The content of v. 15 here calls him now “the mediator of a new covenant.” Stephen Wellum makes a strong case that vv. 15-28 explain why the cross was necessary and ties it to Romans 3:21-26, except that where Rom. 3:21-26 explains Jesus’ sacrifice in a practical way, displaying and defending God’s righteousness, now here in Heb. 9:15, it is explained in terms of the inauguration of the new covenant.¹

Hebrews is unique in revealing Christ’s work and person to us as our great high priest. He took on humanity to undo Adam’s work, which led to the Fall, and to restore us to the purpose God had created us to achieve. In order to do that, He had to become our high priest, after first establishing the credentials to demonstrate and validate His fitness for that office. Note: Heb. 7:23-26; 6:17-20; 5:5-10; 4:14-16; 1:1-4; 9:11-14; 24-26; 10:12-14, 19-23; 13:12-15. The OT Levitical priesthood and high priest was all along pointing to its fulfillment in the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 3:24)

We saw in Heb. 9:1-14, that the OC sacrifices were never intended to be the final sacrifices by God – that’s the reason they had to be repeated day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, until AD 70.

Wellum helpfully points this out:

“In Romans 3, the rationale for Christ’s cross was due to God’s “postponement” of the full payment of human sin, even though God had already declared OT believers just. In doing so, God’s integrity was at stake unless the full satisfaction of sin was ultimately met. In a similar way, Hebrews argues that the people’s sins were not fully paid for under the old system. Thus, for the new covenant to be inaugurated, which promised the permanent forgiveness of sin, a greater priest-sacrifice must pay for the sin of God’s people completely.”²

With Hebrews 9:15 starting off with *“therefore”*, the author is suggesting that he is drawing a conclusion from vv. 11-14 of the Day of Atonement. Therefore, the sacrifice

¹ Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone*, Zondervan, 2017, p. 225

² IBID, p. 227

of Jesus announced in vv. 11-14 is the inauguration of the NC mentioned in chapter 8.³ This NC, then, was inaugurated by Jesus' death, thus telling us that the OC, established in Exodus 24 is no longer in operation! The purpose of Jesus' covenantal work is the main point of v. 15.⁴

What exactly is a mediator? "He is one who goes between differing or contending parties to reconcile them and who represents each part to the other. A mediator intervenes between two parties and must be acceptable to both, and fully capable of representing both."⁵

In v. 15b, "*so that*" means we are being provided with an explanation – the reason that he is the mediator of the new covenant. The author now focuses on the subjects of the NC, "*those who are called may receive the promised inheritance.*" All the promises of such an inheritance made first to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob, will be fulfilled for those who belong to Jesus Christ. This did not become a reality in the old covenant (cf. Heb. 11:39-40), but they have been secured via the new covenant, of which Christ is the Mediator. But what event has secured those promises and allowed them to be applied to "*those who are called*"?

Being among those 'who are called' here refers to effectual calling – the elect – those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (cf. Rev. 13:7-8; 17:8); whom are described by Paul in Romans 8:28-30. This calling (cf. Rom. 4:17; 9:7,12,24-26; I Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:6,15; Eph. 4:1; I Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:1-2) is described as taking place from before time began, or similar phrases describing God's pre-creation decrees in numerous passages. Yet, the results of those decrees are manifested within real time in our lives by means of a God-induced positive response to the Gospel – cf. I Pet. 1:17-23.

Verse 15c – "*since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*" That the death of an innocent substitute was necessary for covering the transgressions committed is obvious from what preceded this verse in vv. 11-14.

But the death of Christ as Mediator was not some emergency measure or Plan B because Plan A wasn't working out. In the realization that the Bible's revelation of redemptive history is progressive, we should realize that the old covenant was a means to a planned end, in which God's purpose was Christ. An unexpected place we find this supported is in Luke 1:67-69, the words of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father's prophecy – especially note v. 72ff.

³ James Thompson, Hebrews, Baker Academic, 2008, p. 188

⁴ Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 274

⁵ Dictionary of Theological Terms, Alan Cairns (ed), Ambassador-Emerald, 1998, p. 224-225

Philip Hughes comments, based on Luke 1, “The new covenant therefore, not only superseded the first or Mosaic Covenant, but was also antecedent to it, and so was anything but an emergency measure.”⁶

Then, to explain the gap / interlude of the centuries of old covenant legal practices, Paul says in Gal. 3:19-29. Philip Hughes again goes on to comment, “The basis of Christ’s mediatorship of the new covenant is “a death which has occurred”. The association of a covenant and its solemnization with death, particularly in the form of a sacrifice with the shedding of blood, appears to have prevailed from the earliest times. Thus the slaughter of animal victims accompanied the establishment of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:9ff; cf. Jer. 34:18); the ratification of the covenant between Jacob and Laban involved the offering of sacrifice (Gen. 31:54); the Mosaic covenant was inaugurated with the building of an altar, the offering of sacrifices, and the sprinkling of the people with “the blood of the covenant” upon their acceptance of the terms of the covenant (Ex. 24:3ff; cf. Zech.9:11 and Heb. 9:19ff); and an altar was built again, for the offering of sacrifice, when the Israelites reaffirmed their allegiance to the covenant on the passing of the leadership from Moses to Joshua and the crossing of the Jordan into the land of promise (Deut. 27:1ff). The new covenant has this in common with the old, that it too came into operation through the sacrificial death of an innocent victim on behalf of the people.”⁷

It should go without saying that Christ is the only Mediator. The entire OT pointed to Him in this role. In I Tim. 2:1-6 (key v.5), Paul focuses on this fact, and lest we miss the significance of this role Jesus alone fills – we are all familiar with some of the other verses that speak of the exclusivity of Christ: Acts 4:11-12; 17:30-31; JN 14:6; 11:25-26; etc.

This verse (Heb. 9:15) stresses not only the exclusive nature of Christ’s Mediatorship, but along with the above-noted passages (with the possible exception of Acts 17:31 – Christ as judge), the eternality of this successful work and intercession for us is the key hope for us as ultimately, the redeemed will spend eternity with Him in a state of joy and sinlessness.

I can’t resist plugging in Hughes’ comments here;

“The fruition of the promised eternal inheritance, moreover, is granted to those who are called – called, that is, by God. This consideration in itself ensures the full effectiveness of the covenant and its promises. All is of God and all is of grace (2 Cor. 5:18). God who has made the provisions for the blessings of this eternal inheritance also by his calling guarantees that there will be inheritors to enter into the enjoyment of it, for his calling is always and indefectibly effectual calling. His Word is his deed (cf. Gen. 1:3ff; Isa. 55:11ff); accordingly, those whom he calls he also leads on through justification to glorification (Rom. 8:30) – in other words, to the eternal

⁶ P. Hughes, p. 365

⁷ Hughes, IBID, p. 366

inheritance, in which not only believers of this present age, but also believers who lived before the coming of Christ, and greeting the fulfillment of the promise from afar, died in faith (Heb. 11:13), will participate with joy and endless thanksgiving. The promise of an eternal possession and an innumerable posterity receives its ultimate fulfillment in the consummation of all things when the great multitude of the redeemed which no man can number will everlastingly praise and serve God in the perfection of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 7:9ff; 21:1ff), thus bringing the divine purpose of creation to the fulness of fruition.”⁸

The Testator

vv. 16-17

It seems to be an odd transition that takes place here from v. 15 to vv. 16-17. In one way, we read in v. 15, “*So that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred...*”, so a will is a necessary legal document which says who the inheritors are and this makes the connection for us. However, we don’t think of God as having a last will and testament, because God cannot die. [but see below].

The Greek word translated here as ‘will’ is ‘*diatheke*’ – the same Greek word which is translated elsewhere as ‘covenant’, and is the standard NT word used to translate the Hebrew word ‘*berith*’.

So, the AH seems to be saying here that the new covenant may be seen as a last will and testament, in the sense that its blessings are only disbursed when the one who made the will dies. While the One who made the covenant is God, who is not subject to death, and therefore cannot practically fulfill the role of testator here, we must recall that Christ, the man is also God. His purpose in coming and being sent as a man is stated this way in Heb. 2:9 – “*But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that, by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*” Philip Hughes points out;

God capacitates himself, so to speak for the fulfillment of this role. Christ is God in action on our behalf (II Cor. 5:19). The inheritance God has promised his people takes effect, and comes into force in the manner of a will, on the death of the incarnate Son.”⁹

F.F. Bruce concurs;

All analogies from normal life must be defective when they are applied to Him who rose from the dead and is thus able personally to secure for his people the benefits which He died to procure for them. He is testator & executor in one, surety [guarantor] and Mediator alike.”¹⁰

⁸ Hughes, p. 368

⁹ IBID, p. 370

¹⁰ FF Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, Eerdmans, 1990, p 223-224

So, the death of the testator, in this case God in Christ, must take place to ensure that the heirs receive the benefits of the riches of the one who has died. This to me is more proof that Jesus' death inaugurates the NC and its blessings.

Paul, in Romans 8:16-17, reasons that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, since we have become God's children.

Richard Phillips reveals how amazing this process of inheritance really is; "See just how amazing this promise is. As heirs of Christ we inherit all the blessings that he has in God. What does this mean in this life? It means that God watches over us with loving care, as He watched over Jesus. It means he sends his Holy Spirit to empower us in godliness as he sent the Spirit to Christ. It means that we have eternal life, the life of heaven, working within us so that we are being motivated by a new and holy power. It means that God has become our Father, and we are his own children in this world. He takes a fatherly interest in us. He is molding us, challenging us, teaching us, and yes, disciplining us toward the harvest of righteousness that he desires (Heb. 12:11).

As great as our inheritance is in this life, it is far greater in death. Then we inherit Christ's resurrection life, a place in heaven, and a home with God forever and ever. Indeed, we will inherit his perfect holiness. The Apostle John marvels: "See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we shall be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 JN 3:1-2)."¹¹

The cross of Christ, His sacrificial death on our behalf, was the necessary event to initiate all the promised blessings of the new covenant. The old order with its imperfections and insufficiencies has been replaced by god. And through the reconciliation and sacrifice made on our behalf by the Son of God, we are made fellow heirs with Christ and we partake of His glory (Romans. 8:15-17).

¹¹ Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 315