

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

What More Can God Say?¹ (On Hebrews)
“Somebody Had to Die: How Christ Fulfills the Old Covenant
[and Guarantees the New Covenant]”
Hebrews 9:15-28

Take a first look.

I. HERE IS YOUR CULTURAL POP QUIZ FOR TODAY. Why do such people as Notary Public's exist? Here is a hint. It is the same reason that locksmiths exist, and the same reason that home security systems experts exist. We don't trust each other. We are afraid that others will take advantage of us. We are afraid that people will cheat us, steal from us, do us harm, if we don't have legal and physical protections. And this is a time-tested fear. How can we be sure that someone will keep his/her word? We hire someone to give legal witness to their signature. We get it in triplicate, and then we file copies with the county and state. We try to make sure that it is all done according to the details of the law, so that the other party will not be able to wiggle out of his/her side of the agreement later.

We want the contracts that are signed to be officially witnessed because we just can't trust each other. We lock our doors for the same reason.

II. NOW, THE RELATIONSHIPS INITIATED BY GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE ARE CALLED COVENANTS. God established covenants with Noah, with Abraham, with the people of Israel. Finally, he made a new covenant, a new agreement, with His people through His own Son, Jesus Christ. Our documents called “The New *Testament*” are all about this new agreement, this *new testament/covenant*.

God foresaw that there would be those who would ask, “How can we be sure that this new *covenant* will be kept? How can we be sure that God will do His part of the agreement? We can't get His signature on the line at the bottom of the page?” Or can we?

III. THE WRITER OF HEBREWS UNDERSTOOD THIS HUMAN RELUCTANCE TO TRUST. As he continued to expound the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, he made it very clear how the terms of this New Deal would be guaranteed. Somebody had to die. Here is what he shows us about that Somebody (capital “S”).

Take a closer look at Hebrews 9:15-28.

I. THE DEATH OF CHRIST HAS BROUGHT TRUE FREEDOM TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. v. 15

1. Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant that gives freedom to the soul of the believer. He Himself is the new Middleman between God and His people. He is the Notary Public, the ultimate Witness, of the New Relationship that God has initiated with His people.

A—Are we interested in entering a life-giving relationship with God, our Creator? Then, we must come to Christ. He is the only Mediator—Middleman—today.

¹ My thanks to Ray Stedman for this thematic question.

John 14:6 (NIV): “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through me.*”

Acts 4:12 (NIV): “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*”

1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV): “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.*”

I—“Steve Winger from Lubbock, Texas, writes about his last college test, a final in a logic class known for its difficult exams: ‘To help us on our test, the professor told us we could bring as much information to the exam as we could fit on a piece of notebook paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible on their 8-1/2 x 11-inch sheet of paper. But one student walked into class, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor, and had an advanced logic student stand on the paper.

“The advanced logic student told him everything he needed to know. He was the only student to receive an ‘A.’ The ultimate final exam will come when we stand before God and he asks, ‘Why should I let you in?’ On our own we cannot pass that exam. Our creative attempts to earn eternal life fall far short. But we have Someone who will stand in for us.”² Jesus knows all the answers. He stands up for us before the Ultimate Grader, the Judge of all the earth (see Genesis 18:25). At the judgment, it will not just be *what* we know, it will be *Whom* we know that matters.

2. *This mediation was brought about by His death.* Here is the heart of what God has done to guarantee our New Deal with Him. His own Son has died as a “ransom” to set us free from sin and death.

A—Do we realize the extent to which our God has gone to show His love for humanity?

I—Picture this scene. “Shortly after sunrise on January 2, 2000, a noose was placed around the neck of 17-year-old Morteza Moqaddam. He killed a fellow Iranian in Tehran on December 13 after a quarrel about smoking in public. Now, the portable gallows was standing just thirty-feet from where the crime was committed and a large crowd had assembled for the execution. With hands cuffed and tears streaming down his ashen face, the teenager waited for the final signal to end his short life. To his utter surprise, the victim’s father, Ali Mohebbi, exercised his privilege under Iran’s Islamic legal system and granted the boy forgiveness. Just seconds before being hanged, he was extended grace rather than justice. The killer’s mother collapsed under the strain and cried out, ‘I will never forget as long as I live how he gave me my son’s life back.’ After receiving clemency Moqaddam was ushered away from the gallows in an ambulance that was waiting to take his body to the morgue. State-run television ran footage of the teenager repeatedly thanking the father whose son he killed.³

Consider the parallel. We stand like the murderous teenager, guilty and worthy of death, but the Father has “demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV).

3. *This mediation has taken care of both the past and the future for God’s people.*

² *Leadership*, Vol. 15, no. 4.

³ *In Other Words*, Winter 2000, p. 7, from the *Houston Chronicle*, 1/3/00, p. 8A.

a. The past: “ransom” – God has paid the price to return us to freedom. The effect of this ransom: he “set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

A—Do we need release from the guilt and shame of past failures? We must come to Christ, Who alone holds the power of forgiveness in His hand.

b. The future: “eternal inheritance” – Christ’s work makes this eternal inheritance possible.

A—Do we need hope beyond the present limited vision of our future? We must come to Christ, Who alone holds the future in His hand.

I—Writing in *First Things* magazine several years ago, Psychiatrist Aaron Kheriaty drew a clear conclusion about the startling rise in deaths from suicide and drug overdoses. In ‘Dying of Despair,’ he points to a number of long-term studies that have analyzed the difference between high-risk patients who survive and those who die by suicide. Here’s his conclusion of this research:

Over a ten-year span, it turns out that the one factor most strongly predictive of suicide is not how sick the person is, nor how many symptoms he exhibits, nor how much physical pain he is suffering, nor whether he is rich or poor. The most dangerous factor is a person’s sense of hopelessness. The man without hope is the likeliest candidate for suicide. ... We cannot live without hope.”⁴

Remember the Apostle Paul’s description of the Gentiles, those who were not connected to the promises of God for the coming of Jesus the Christ? He described them like this: “*excluded from the citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **having no hope and without God in the world***” (Ephesians 2:12, FJV, my emphasis). How can we be sure that we have hope? We need to know God! How can we do this? Through Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior.

II. THE DEATH OF CHRIST HAS GUARANTEED THE FORGIVENESS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. vv. 16-22

1. The New Covenant of God has taken force with the death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. The illustration given by the writer here is that of a “last will and testament.” It is interesting that the same word in Greek is used when describing a “will” as when describing a “contract agreement.” The word is *diatheke*. He says that a *will* only takes force after the death of the one making it. Somebody must die, for that person’s will to take effect.

2. This fulfills the requirement of the Old Covenant that everything be cleansed by blood. The writer describes how Moses cleansed the people and the tabernacle and everything else used in its ceremonies. This is the analogy and background for what God has done for us in Christ. “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” Nothing could summarize the Old Covenant sacrificial system better.

A—So here is the kernel of application: Christ *died* for us! *For* us! *For our* sins. Have we entered that forgiveness and hope of eternal life?

⁴ Aaron Kheriaty, “Dying of Despair,” *First Things* (August 2017).

1 Peter 3:18a (NIV): “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” There is the heart of Jesus’ role as our Middleman: “To bring you to God.”

I—We must admit we aren’t there, that even the supposedly fine, upstanding-citizen-types need the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Consider the pastor who was taking a late afternoon walk, when he came upon a group of young neighborhood boys standing around a dog. He was curious, so he asked them what they were doing. The oldest boy explained how the dog was a stray and they all wanted to take him home. So, to determine who got him, they were trying to see who could tell the best lie. The pastor immediately reprimanded them for lying and then tagged on an impromptu 10-minute sermon. He concluded his remarks, finally, with this: “When I was your age, I never even dreamed of telling a lie.” After a few moments of silence, the youngest boy turned to his friends, gave a big sigh, and said, “O.K., give him the dog.”

The truth is, “*all* have sinned and keep falling short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “Never dreamed of telling a lie”? yeah, right. Were it not for the grace of God in Christ, none of us would have hope of knowing God or having eternal life.

III. THE DEATH OF CHRIST IS THE FINAL SACRIFICE NEEDED FOR THE SINS OF HUMANITY. vv. 23-28

1. *Jesus entered heaven itself on our behalf.* He went right to the very top of the hierarchy of creation, “now to appear for us *in God’s presence*” (v. 24).

2. *He offered His own blood for the sins of humanity.* Because of this, he didn’t have to go back again and again with animal sacrifices. No. “He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26).

3. *This gives us true hope for the future.* We die once, he asserts, and then we face judgment (v. 27). In the same way, Christ died once for all “to take away the sins of many people” (those who put their faith in Him), and “he will appear a second time, not to bear sin” [he already did this once for all], “but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (v. 28).

A—Because of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and promised return, we can have hope. Death is no longer the end; but rather, it is the beginning of fulness of life.

I—The February 2000 issue of Prison Fellowship’s newsletter *Jubilee Extra* carried the story of Amy McVickers. When she was 7, her mother walked out on her. She was molested by one of the four brothers left at home. She tried to get away from the shame by getting into track and field. She earned awards that her family didn’t even acknowledge. At 11, she smoked her first joint, and by 13 had moved to LSD and cocaine. She ran away from home at 14, dropped out of school at 15, and spend the next 15 years drinking and drugging, doing some modeling, once even for a porn magazine. Somehow during all of this she managed to get her GED. By age 29, she married Bill, a drug-addict, who encouraged her to turn to prostitution for their expensive habits. She became a “high-dollar call girl” who serviced her well-to-do clients in four-star hotels.

When she was arrested and given probation, she still didn’t stop her drug habit. She got pregnant, planned to relinquish her parental rights and allow him to be adopted, but then she saw the little towheaded newborn son. She changed her mind, brought the baby home, and Bill left. Then he came back, then he left. Finally, after a cycle of leaving and coming mixed with

abuse, she fled Bill, running from Houston to Austin, Texas. This violated her probation. When the police caught up to her, her son was just over a year old, with whom she had never bonded, and she was sentenced to a four-year prison term.

Dicken's expression—"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times"—described her experience in prison. She described it as "the hardest thing I ever did, but also the best thing." It was there that Christian volunteers pointed her to Jesus Christ. After their repeated witness, she finally committed her life to Christ on August 2, 1993. The next day her husband filed for divorce and full custody of Colton. This shook her badly, but she was able to keep in touch with her son through a PF program called Angel Tree.

PF's Angel Tree program moved her deeply. These strangers gave her son Colton Christmas presents and told him they were from his *mom*! Amy continued to grow in her knowledge of the Lord, reading through the New Testament several times. After only a year, she was paroled. She called a name that was given her by the chaplain, and then she moved in with Jim and Judy. They helped her to develop a responsible Christian life.

Three years ago, she married Robert, also a recovering addict transforming by the power of Christ. 8 days after the wedding, ex-husband Bill "delivered Colton right to our door," says Amy. She sees that as a powerful work of God. Though she still has terrible dreams about drug abuse and prostitution, she is able to wake up Robert to pray. God is helping her rebuild what she lost in the years apart from her son. She is learning the power of God. "I know He has cleansed me of my past," she affirms.

She then became a trained volunteer with PF, and she began to take that message into women's prisons in Texas. She coordinated the Angel Tree ministry of her church in Austin, that provided gifts for 500 children of inmates one year. Her story was bracketed by this text of Scripture: "Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten ... and you shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you" (Joel 2:25-26). So true, in her case!

Take it home (applications).

I. DO WE NEED TO FIND SUCH TRANSFORMING POWER IN OUR LIVES?

II. WE MUST COME TO CHRIST! HE ALONE CAN BRING US BACK TO GOD, BRING THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS INTO OUR EXPERIENCE, GIVE US BACK THE YEARS DEVoured BY SIN.

III. WE MUST NOT KEEP SUCH GOOD NEWS TO OURSELVES!