

Out of the Shadows

Hebrews 8:1-13

The writer's listeners were in danger of turning back to Judaism and to religion. Religion – rather than grace – is the default mode of the human heart: we think we can save ourselves by the way we live. So this is a temptation we all face, and the writer addresses it in Chapter 8.

Shadows and Reality

The writer has been speaking about Jesus being a High Priest. When it comes to trying to bridge the gap between us and God by religion – we don't need to, because we already have a High Priest, and he has done all that we need.

Our High Priest is seated at God's right hand. That tells us something about his status: there is no one greater. But it also tells us that his work is finished. With religion, our work is never finished – we can never do enough. But Christ has done it for us and we can find our rest in him.

But the writer also tells us that all the externals of religion are just shadows of the reality – which is Christ. And if there was nothing wrong with the Old Covenant, why would God have spoken about a new covenant?

Religion Doesn't Work

A covenant was a binding agreement built upon a relationship. The writer says that God's original covenant with his people was flawed for two reasons: the problem of the human heart, and the fact that religion cannot fix the human heart. In fact, rather than fixing the human heart, all the sacrifices and rules of the old covenant simply showed how bad it was.

So there's got to be a better way.

The Relationship That Transforms

The writer quotes from Jeremiah to show how different the new covenant is from the old.

The new covenant brings about:

A new heart: God transforms our hearts as we trust in what Jesus has done for us.

A new relationship: Christ makes it possible for us to know God in deep intimate relationship, and personal experience.

A new community: He makes his a new people, not just new individuals. And this new community is to be marked by radical equality: 'they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.'

And this is all possible, not because we make the grade, but because of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ. He forgives us and remembers our sin no more – because of what Christ has done for us at the cross. God turned his face away from him, that he might turn it towards us.

So nothing can keep you from knowing God in real intimacy. Religion can never offer you that, only grace can.