

Title: The Eternal Covenant  
Text: Hebrews 13.20-21  
Theme: The Commitment of God  
Series: Hebrews #63  
Prop Stmtnt: Forever the Word of God is settled in the heavens and is worthy of your trust.

Read Text:

*The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins was a *New York Times* bestseller for fifty-one weeks. Dawkins argues that evolution has rendered any type of religious faith to be fundamentally obsolete. According to Dawkins, science and faith cannot co-exist. Christopher Hitchens asserts that religion poisons everything and is so fatally rooted in ignorance that no one who is a Christian (or follower of other religion) can do the work of science which demands free inquiry. Daniel Dennett calls people like us *drunk drivers* who are not only a danger to ourselves, but we are a danger to others and are doubly culpable because we have allowed religion to cloud our thinking process. They argue that we are weak-minded types who find comfort in the myths of faith because we cannot handle the truth of reality. In their reality, there is no God, no truth, no purpose, no hope and no reasons other than the process of natural selection. Get over it.

These new atheists (as they are called) command quite a following including the science and philosophy departments of many major institutions. To be a student who does not succumb or a grad student who does not tow the line is to invite a great deal of abuse upon yourself. To be a scientist who is a public follower of Christ is to commit career-suicide. In their minds you cannot truly be intelligent and follow Christ. There is great hostility in many academic circles to Christianity. The followers, the books, the assumptions, the popularity of evolution and atheism (they go hand in hand) makes it dangerous to follow Christ. But when you really examine their core beliefs, you quickly find out that they are not characterized by free and open inquiry. They are hostile to Christianity. Why? Because in reality, they cannot handle the truth that there is a God to whom they will give an account and before whom they will bow. They will do everything they can to subvert, dodge, bob, weave and intimidate in an attempt to convince others, but fundamentally themselves that there is no God, no sin, no judgment and no hell.

Living as a follower of Christ does not seem to be safe in the face of adversity. But when you examine the adversity and what they believe, and what true authority they have and compare that to God you realize that the only safe place to be is under the care of God. Let me explain it this way.

Safe vs. Unsafe image (what makes it safe or not?)

There is a phrase in this benediction that serves as the grounding of this prayer. In other words, this phrase is the reason why the author of Hebrews can pray with such boldness for these people. It is also why we can pray, live, believe and persevere with such boldness and joy. This morning we are going to look at why we have confidence in God

and not Richard Dawkins. We are going to look at the history of God's promises and see how he speaks and how he keeps his Word. Philosophers and theologians call this epistemology or the reasons why you believe what you believe. Why do you believe God? Why would these believers called the Hebrews stand up to such persecution when giving up and giving in would be so easy? Since, the pressure to give in to the expectations of others is so strong, the author of Hebrews begins this letter by reminding them of the position and the authority of God. Over and over he appeals to the trustworthiness of God, to the promises of God, to the Word of God, and to the accomplishments of God in order to make a case for these people to stay true. Trust God, besides there is nowhere else to go. So, in his final prayer for them he appeals to the God of peace, power and promises to equip these dear people with everything that they need in order press on with joy in the face of adversity. He prays that God will work in them to do that which is pleasing in his sight. But notice this. He prays this “by the blood of the eternal covenant.” In other words, the eternal covenant is the grounding, it is the right by which he can pray this, and it is the confidence that he has that it will be done.

We are probably not as familiar with the Old Testament as many of these Hebrew believers would have. So, while we might be tempted to gloss over the phrase “by the blood of the eternal covenant”, this would have stood out to them because of the history and meaning that is behind it. Covenants appear in several places in the Scriptures. It is very easy for us to think of a covenant as an agreement or a contract of sorts. There is some truth to that, but there is so much more. I will give you my definition of a covenant, and then show you some of the covenants in the Bible and how they not only inform this prayer, but how they give it both grounding for security and wings to fly.

*A covenant is a solemn commitment between two or more persons, which guarantees that all promises made will be kept, even at the cost of death.* A covenant usually has three components:

- Terms of the Covenant (Promises and Expectations)

This is not only the content of the covenant that defines the arrangement, but in almost every covenant, the terms are not negotiated by two parties, but the terms are set forth by the one who is in charge. That is why there are two parts to the terms. Promises – Here is what I will do for you. (and) Expectations – Here is what you will do in response. If you follow the terms of this covenant there is blessing. If you do not follow the terms of this covenant there is cursing.

- Sacrifice (Cost of the Covenant)

The sacrifice was usually the death of something of value in order to show both the importance and value of the covenant but death also spoke to the seriousness of the consequences of not following it. Obviously, this is very important since the phrase that we are looking at is, “by **the blood** of the eternal covenant.” The sacrifice associated with the covenant, was the usually the ratification of the covenant.

- Sign (Reminder of the Covenant)

The sign was a symbol that served to remind you of the commitment that had been made. Now, before you can understand the eternal covenant, you need to understand the covenants that God established that lead up to this. So, let's look at some covenants in Scripture. I want you to see how God has made promises and kept promises. I want you to see that God's Word is forever settled and is worthy of your trust. I want you to see how God goes on the record over and over and communicates his Word and calls you and me to follow him and obey him. Look at his credibility. Look at his history. He is worthy of your trust. He will come through.

**I. The Noahic Covenant**

The first time this word appears in the Bible is in Genesis 6.18, where God tells Noah that he Will establish covenant with him, which he does at the end of chapter 8 and into chapter 9. The terms of the covenant are spelled out both in terms of promises and expectations.

**A. Terms –**

1. Promises (here are some, there are more in the text)
  - a. I will never again curse the ground
  - b. I will never again kill every living creature like I did
  - c. The seasons of the earth will not cease
  - d. I will never again flood the entire earth with water
2. Expectations
  - a. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (that is a theologically loaded statement)
  - b. Do not murder!

**B. Sacrifice**

Noah built an altar to the LORD and offered some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird (significant sacrifice in view of how little was left).

**C. Sign – Rainbow – 9.12**

**II. The Abrahamic Covenant(s)**

There are (in my opinion) two separate but related covenants that God establishes with Abraham. The first one in Genesis 15 deals with God's promise to make Abraham the father of a great nation and the second one in Genesis 17 deals with God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham and his offspring. Both covenants have terms and sacrifice. The second one has a sign. Let's look at this one.

**A. Terms –**

1. Promises
  - a. You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
  - b. I will make you exceedingly fruitful.
  - c. I will make you into nations
  - d. Kings shall come from you.
  - e. I will establish my everlasting covenant between me and you and your offspring to be God to you and your offspring.
  - f. I will give you the land of Canaan
2. Expectations
  - a. Walk before me and be blameless
  - b. Keep my covenant
  - c. Circumcision

## **B. Sacrifice**

Abraham was called to offer up his son Isaac (Genesis 22) which was the ultimate sacrifice for him to make. The previous covenant (Genesis 15) started with sacrifice like the Noahic covenant.

## **C. Sign – Circumcision – Genesis 17.11**

## **III. The Mosaic Covenant - Exodus 19-24**

We studied this in depth when we went through the book of Exodus. This covenant is enormous. In fact the terms of this covenant is what we mean when we speak of the OT Law. The Mosaic Covenant describes in so many ways what God meant when he said, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

### **A. Terms –**

1. Promises (I will only cover a few) (19.5-6 and 24.23-32)
  - a. You shall be my treasured possession
  - b. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation
  - c. I will bless you with bread and water
  - d. I will take sickness away from among you
  - e. None shall miscarry or be barren among you
  - f. I will fulfill the number of your days
2. Expectations – (20 – 23)
  - a. 10 commandments
  - b. Sacrificial System
  - c. National Law (laws pertaining to the land)

### **B. Sacrifice**

Exodus 24 tells us about the confirmation of the covenant. Moses and some of the “young men of the people of Israel” (v.5) offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings to the LORD.

- C. **Sign** – the Shekinah presence of God. (First with the people, then on the mountain, then in the Tabernacle and finally in the Temple.

One could make a case that there was a priestly (Levitical) covenant that God established with the tribe of Levi as part of the Mosaic covenant, complete with terms, sacrifice and signs.

#### IV. **The Davidic Covenant** – 2 Samuel 7

##### A. **Terms** –

1. Promises (summary)
  - a. I will make for you a great name.
  - b. I will give you rest.
  - c. I will make you a house.
  - d. I will raise up your offspring
  - e. Your son will build a house for me.
  - f. I will establish your throne forever
2. Expectations
  - a. Essentially nothing. Don't build me a house because I am building you a house.

- ##### B. **Sacrifice** – none recorded, though David went before the LORD in humble prayer.

- ##### C. **Sign** – David's “son” will reign forever.

#### **Summary of Covenants:**

1. God initiates the Covenant and chooses the recipients.
2. God sets the terms of the Covenant.
3. The Covenant demonstrates the grace, the power, love and the plans of God for the good of his people.
4. God will not break his word.
5. God is infinitely serious about His Covenants.

The end of David's reign and the beginning of Solomon's is really the apex of the Old Testament. From this point things are almost all downhill. Even Solomon, who started out with so much promise, ends in disappointment. The nation splits. The northern kingdom rejects the Mosaic, Levitical and Davidic covenants. The southern kingdom follows pretty close behind. The prophets warn over and over of the consequences of this. God uses the enemies of his people to warn them of the danger that they are in, all to no avail. At the end of the OT, the nation of Israel is no more and the nation of Judah has

barely survived and is a shadow of her former self. The promises of God, which are so glorious were jeopardized and discarded by the unbelief and disobedience of the people leaving the reader to wonder, “what was all of that about?” It appears that these covenants were nothing more than colossal failures, with the possible exception of Noah.

But, as the prophets warned the people who were violating the Mosaic covenant, they also spoke of the day when a “new” covenant would be established. A new one was needed, NOT because the Old one was bad, but because the Old one had basically been abolished by the sins of the people. The prophets spoke of a day when God would establish a new covenant and this one would be new and eternal because God was going to write it on the hearts of the people. In this new covenant, God was going to guarantee that his people would be faithful, true and secure. In fact, this new covenant would encompass and fulfill all of the promises of God that at this point looked to be in jeopardy.

God promised to bless the nations through the seed of Abraham. God promised David that from him would come a king who would reign forever and ever. God promised the prophets that he would raise a people from the nations of the world who would be faithful because he was going to keep them. How was this going to be? When we come to the New Testament (New Covenant), we find out. In fact, God is not in a panic. This is what God had planned all along. The other covenants were all preparation for this one. They pointed to this one. The other covenants revealed our need, this one revealed our Savior!

It is not my purpose to go into great detail comparing all of these, nor do I have the time. But note this. When you look at these first 4 covenants, you realize that there are some things that they have in common with the Eternal Covenant, because they are in many ways the foundation of it. However, there are other parts of some of these covenants that are discarded because the Eternal Covenant fulfills them and renders aspects of them obsolete. So, you will see some continuity and some discontinuity. For example, the New Covenant involves the nation of Israel (continuity) and the peoples of the earth (new). The New Covenant involves a sign (continuity) but the sign is different (discontinuity). Now, as interesting as all of this is to us, do you see how much more captivating this would be to these Hebrews? This was their ethnic history. Their own people were the ones that God used to bring to this world the One who would establish the New and Eternal Covenant with people from all over the world. And oh what a Covenant it is! This Covenant is the climactic culmination of all of the other covenants!

## **V. The New (Eternal) Covenant**

Like the covenants before, it is God who establishes the terms of this covenant. He is the Sovereign Ruler who dictates the rules by which his government will function. It is not until the upper room that Jesus explicitly states that he is establishing the New Covenant, but from the beginning of his life on the earth, it is clear that this is what is going on. Christ is laying out for us that this is what it means for God to say, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

**A. Terms**

1. Promises (I will be your God) and here is what you can expect of me.
  - a. I will cleanse you and forgive you fully, and finally and perfectly.
  - b. I alone will provide salvation for you through my Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - c. I will keep you.
  - d. I will dwell in you and seal you.
  - e. I will never let you go.
  - f. I will reign over you and through you.
  - g. I will build a city for you.
  - h. I will live with you forever.
  - i. I will provide for you.
  - j. I will love you.
  - k. I will raise you from the dead.
  - l. I will never leave nor forsake you.
  - m. I will give you a High Priest who stands in your behalf.
  - n. I will come again for you.
  - o. I will not lie and I will not die!
  
2. Expectations (You will be my people)
  - a. Believe in me alone! (and I will give you the faith to do that)
  - b. Don't stop believing (and I will keep giving you the faith to do that too)
  - c. Obey me. My commands are good, true, and full of blessing.
  - d. Love me

This is the issue for many of you. The promises of God are appealing, but the expectation of obedience is too confining. Part of you recognizes that you cannot make the promises that God makes. You need to be the recipient of his promises. But that means that you submit to God and you do not want to do that. You want the promises without the expectations. But, that is not the terms of the covenant. God makes the covenant. The terms are not up for negotiation or discussion.

**B. Sacrifice – Christ!**

This is the heart of the new covenant and why the new covenant is the eternal covenant and why the a refers to this covenant as the grounding of all of God's promises. This is why the death of Christ is so important to us, for his death was the ratification of the eternal covenant. His death was the culmination of all of the other sacrifices which is why this covenant is the culmination of all of the other covenants.

Through Christ, the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled. Through Christ, the sacrifices and the expectations delivered through Moses are completed. Through Christ, the throne of David is established forever and ever. Christ is the one who is anticipated even in the law. He is the perfect prophet that Moses spoke about, the perfect priest that Aaron could not be, the perfect sacrifice that they never had and the perfect King who could not die. He is the true Israel through whom salvation would come to the nations, the one through whom forgiveness and cleansing would be offered. He is the ultimate sacrifice in that there is no lamb as pure as him, no man as perfect as him, no offering as complete as him, no atonement as sufficient as him, no payment as final as him, no gift as generous as him, no righteousness as divine as him, no death as satisfying as his, no resurrection as powerful as his, no King as glorious as him, no return as triumphant as him, no warrior as victorious as him and no kingdom as eternal as him! And because his once and for all, gloriously sufficient, sin-paying, God-satisfying, wrath-appeasing, soul-cleansing, death-killing, grave-robbing death ratifies the new covenant, this new covenant is the Eternal Covenant. There is no more!

### **C. Sign – Baptism and Lord’s Supper**

This is why the author of Hebrews prays for these people. This is the confidence that we have to pray for one another. This is the security that we have. This is why there is no risk to following Christ.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Who are you going to believe?