

Hebrews 8:7-

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

8 For he finds fault with them when he says:

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,*

*9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.*

*For they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.*

*10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord:*

*I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

*11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.*

*12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.”*

*13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming
obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

What was the old covenant? It was the covenant of the law. It said, “Do this and I will do that. Live as My people, and I will be your God.” And it was a good covenant. God had made it, and He had every intention of keeping it. And He did keep it. That was never the problem. What was the problem, then? Israel had failed to hold up its end of the bargain. Slowly, and sometimes not so slowly, Israel wandered farther and farther away from the Lord. They forgot all that the Lord had done for them. They shrugged off His commandments. They forsook the God who was jealous for them and their salvation for false idols of wood and stone. They wanted to be more like the children of the world and so became less like the children of God. They did less and less of the “this” until God in His justice, and yes, in His love, could no longer do the “that.” Sin must be punished. God could not overlook it forever. And for their own good Israel needed to be disciplined, to be called to the safety of the Lord’s Word and promise. And this happened, again and again, usually through their enemies, whose very gods they had chased after, and yet in the end to little avail. As fallen sinners, they were prone to sinning. Once more, they forgot what the Lord had done for them. They became enchanted with foreign and idolatrous culture and individuals, taking them as their spouses, adopting their practices.

All this was not because there was a defect in the old covenant, in the law, but rather in the people with whom it had been made. Sin is not only what we commit or omit in thought, word, or deed; sin is a part of who we are by nature. We are sinful from conception. We are born sinners. Our only hope, then, if the law was to be kept, and if we were going to have any hope of being saved, was for one without sin to keep it perfectly in our stead, as one of us, to uphold

God's justice, and for us somehow to be made something other than what we were born, to be born again, so to speak.

That is what our Lord Christ came to do. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, He was only the third human being to see the face of this earth without sin, and the first to be born that way. The original sin that so plagues our race was not imputed to Him, because He was our heavenly Father's Son. And not only that, but He was the obedient Son we too often fail to be. He kept the law throughout His life. He neither committed nor omitted anything in thought, word, or deed. And having been found blameless in every way, He instituted and realized for us a new covenant, a covenant of grace, a covenant in His Blood, a promise made long ago, now fulfilled, and availing for repentant sinners until He comes again. You are children of that promise, born again of water and the Spirit, declared innocent through faith in the crucified and risen Lamb of God, set free to serve like Him, albeit never in so systematic and spotless a way, as obedient sons of the heavenly Father. That is the covenant God has made with you—a covenant whose only end for you to keep is kept through the gift that the Spirit has already bestowed upon you: faith that believes the promise. Amen.