

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, some days can be very hard, and we need the touch of Your loving hand to help us and guide us through our troubles; and some days are easier for us as You empower us to do great things for You. Whatever happens to us each day, may we have confidence in Your love and care, and always give testimony to You, because You are with us always. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Searching the soul

Today, ask yourself whether you have been as responsive to the work of the Lord in your soul as you might have been in recent times. Spend some time in quietness, and ask the Lord to help you reflect on whether there are things you need to hear from Him, or do for Him. Pray, and ask the Lord to lead you on in your discipleship, and help you grow in godliness.

Meditation

This is the power God has given us in Christ;

The power of love, to restore the spirit,
The power of what is good, to help others,
The power of integrity, to sustain what is right,
The power of faith, to aspire to new things,
The power of honesty, to keep hold of what is pure,
The power of self-control, to discipline the soul,
The power of hope, to shine a beacon on our paths,
The power of boldness, to proclaim the Gospel,
The power of gentleness, to care for the lost.

The power of God is given to be used;
Receive His gift of the Holy Spirit!

Bible Study - Hebrews 8:7-13

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no reason to look for a second one; ⁸ but God found fault with the people when He says:

'The time is coming, says the Lord, when I will bring about a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not keep faith with my covenant, and I turned away from them, says the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, says the Lord: I will place my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ One person will no longer teach another saying "know the Lord", for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and remember their sins no more.'

¹³ By speaking of a 'new covenant', He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Review

Right at the heart of everything Hebrews says about the priesthood of Christ, stands this very famous passage which consists largely of a quote from Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). Hebrews uses this quote to justify the argument that God always intended to do away with the old covenant, with its old priesthood and its laws and regulations based on God's revelation to Moses, and replace it with something better (8:6,7), which is to be found in Christ. The remarkable thing about this quote is that although Hebrews sometimes quotes the Old Testament rather loosely, which makes it difficult for us to see how the quotes were obtained (e.g. Hebrews 1:5-13), most of this quote is accurate and the same as the text we can find in Jeremiah 31 in our own Bibles, with a little leeway for translational differences.

Hebrews says in this passage that God did away with the old covenant because of the sins of the people of Israel (8:7,8), but does not say anything as yet about how the priesthood of Christ is to be linked with the idea of a new covenant. This will come in the next chapter. For the time being, the focus is on God's Word through Jeremiah. The prophecies of Jeremiah are not often quoted in the New Testament, but this substantial quote brings his prophetic work to the forefront of our understanding of the work of Christ. Jeremiah is not an easy prophetic book to read, because the prophecies are not recorded in chronological order. However, most people would accept that this very passage is central to his work, and its use in Hebrews is very helpful to Christians who want to try and find out why God should move on beyond the great revelations of the Old Testament and do a new work in Christ.

Jeremiah lived at the time of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. In 597 BC the Babylonians first came to Jerusalem and removed its king, placing a puppet ruler on the throne (a certain king Zedekiah). When this king rebelled against the Babylonians, they came back and razed Jerusalem to the ground, destroying the whole city and Solomon's Temple as well (587 BC). With all this going on around him, Jeremiah asked the Lord 'why is this happening?' The Lord then revealed to Jeremiah that the people of Judah and Jerusalem had become so sinful that He had decided to destroy Jerusalem and rebuild His people again (see Jer 7:27f.) It was a radical and deeply disturbing message which made Jeremiah a hated man in his day. He remained faithful to the Lord, however, and not only prophesied (correctly) the end of the kingdom of Judah, but saw beyond the pain and suffering of the people of his day, to a time when God would do a new work amongst His own people. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the most famous prophecy which speaks of this hope, and the prophet declares boldly God's work of renewal. Most controversially, his prophecy speaks of God's laws as not being taken away, superseded, or abandoned, but placed in the 'minds' of the people and 'written on their hearts' (8:10). Jeremiah never spoke about how this would come about, but these words have always been regarded as a most powerful explanation of what God eventually did for His people through Jesus Christ.

This extraordinary message from the Old Testament is important because it tells us that God had planned to do something new with His law (8:10), and that is why Hebrews uses it. If God intended to remake His laws and write them on people's hearts and minds, then this meant that a new priest would be required to bring this renewal, and Hebrews has already argued strongly that this is Jesus Christ (8:1-6). The passage still speaks to us today, because people still have a religious tendency to be legalistic, even with Christian faith. Jeremiah's message quoted in this passage of Hebrews reminds us that unless our relationship with God is fixed in our hearts and minds rather than doing 'religious' things, then we have missed the mark. True Christianity is a matter of having a relationship with God through Jesus, and the real Church of God is built upon the shared experience of worship and service of God's people, and not the maintenance of any system of religious laws, even today.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read the beginning and the end of today's passage to make sure you know how the letter to the Hebrew's is using this quote from Jeremiah.
2. Read through the prophecy from Jeremiah, and discuss in your group which part of it you find most meaningful for today.
3. Why should we not need to teach each other to 'know the Lord' (8:11)?

Discipleship

When Jeremiah says that God's people should not have to teach each other to 'know the Lord', this means that each one of us should have all we need to maintain our relationship with God through Christ, in our hearts and minds. Occasionally, it can be helpful to do a personal audit, in which we sit down and write out what we believe about our Lord, and what is on our hearts and in our minds about the things of faith. Are we on the right track? Do we need to discover more, read our Bibles, pray, worship, or serve others? Much can come from such an exercise.

Final Prayer

Thank You, Almighty God, for the revelations You have given to Your prophets, which guided people of old through all kinds of difficult experiences. May we read them and get to know them, so that we can find Your help through their words, and be blessed by Your Word: AMEN