

**CAN'T STOP**  
**CAN I STOP**

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vGroup Study

Can't Stop Won't Stop: vGroup Study

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# HEBREWS 8

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author has argued that Jesus is better—he's better than angels, better than Moses, and a better high priest. What is the author's point? The point is that Jesus offers us something better than what we could ever give ourselves.

In Steffany Gretzinger's *Defender*, Gretzinger's lyrics can help us to envision at least one way in which Jesus is better.

*You go before I know you have even gone to win my war  
Your love becomes my greatest defense  
It leads me from the dry wilderness*

*And all I did was praise  
All I did was worship  
All I did was bow down  
All I did was stay still*

*Hallelujah, You have saved me  
So much better Your way  
And hallelujah, Great Defender  
So much better Your way*

In this song, our personal struggles are put into a spiritual perspective. The fight we are engaged in may be with guilt, shame, vengeance, or addiction. But in this song, we are met with a surprising image—it's not the worshipper who wins the war—it's God. All self-sufficiency succumbs to praise, worship, prostration, and stillness; Jesus wins a war we could never have hoped to win. What is more, if we had relied on our own efforts, we would be broken, bitter, vengeful, and hopelessly lost. By letting Jesus fight for us, we come out forgiven, free, and full of hope—it really is better his way.

The world of Hebrews 8 is a very different world from our own. When the author originally wrote this passage, words like priest and covenant had a lot of meaning to his audience. For the audience, a priest was an intermediary between a holy God and sinful man—a needed middle-man whose job made sense for a people steeped in the story of the Old Testament. A covenant was a commitment between two parties and was enacted through the sacrifice of an animal. For us today, however, these concepts are foreign. What does a text like Hebrews 8 have to tell us?

*<sup>1</sup>Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup>a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. <sup>3</sup>For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. <sup>4</sup>Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. <sup>5</sup>They serve a copy and*

*shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."*

Hebrews 8:1-5

- According to verse 1, what is the author's main point?
- According to verse 3, what must every high priest do?
- Looking at verse 4, what does the author mean by "now if he [Jesus] were on earth"? What part of Jesus' ministry does this refer to? (Hint: his incarnation)
- What is the author's reason as to why Jesus did not have a job like a priest?

According to the author, Jesus is a better priest because he serves in the heavenly temple, not the earthly one. While on earth, Jesus did not work in the temple because there were already priests doing that job. Jesus is not like one of the earthly priests—the earthly priests serve in a copy of the heavenly temple; Jesus serves in the real, heavenly prototype. In this way, Jesus is already better than anything the earthly temple had to offer.

*<sup>6</sup>But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*

*<sup>7</sup>For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

*<sup>8</sup>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,*

*<sup>9</sup>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.*

Hebrews 8:6-10

- Jesus is better because he serves in a heavenly temple. Now in verse 6, the author adds additional information. According to verse 6, why is Jesus better?
- What covenant does the author have in mind in verse 9? What happened to this first covenant? (Hint: Sinai; the Golden Calf)
- Where were the laws of the first covenant written? (Hint: tablets of stone)
- Where are the laws of the new covenant written?

<sup>10</sup>*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.*

<sup>11</sup>*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.*

<sup>12</sup>*For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more."*

<sup>13</sup>*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.*

Hebrews 8:11-13

- What impact does this have for believers when the law is written on the heart, and not on stone?

Here is where the author's argument comes to a head. The reason why Jesus is better than the old covenant is that Jesus' new covenant can really forgive sins and produce authentic obedience. Through the old covenant, Israel was only reminded of their sins

through the priests and sacrificial system. If priests and sacrifices really reconciled sinners to God, there would have been no need to continue the sacrifices, yet the sacrificial system went on year after year. Jesus offers a better covenant because it grants forgiveness and reconciliation with God and produces authentic obedience.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are common terms in our Christian vocabulary that are easily taken for granted. We don't always consider how valuable a concept like forgiveness is when we realize that there can be no forgiveness in this world without God. Why? Because forgiveness presumes moral guilt, and if God does not exist, neither does moral guilt. A moral law requires a moral law-giver. Consider the following song that explores the meaningless of life in the absence of a divine answer:

*From the canyons of my mind  
We wander on and stumble blind  
Wade through the often tangled maze  
Of starless nights and sunless days,  
Hoping for some kind of clue—  
A road to lead us to the truth.  
But who will answer?...  
Is our hope in walnut shells  
Worn 'round the neck with temple bells?  
Or deep within some cloistered walls  
Where hooded figures pray in shawls?  
Or high upon some dusty shelves,  
Or in the stars,  
Or in ourselves?  
Who will answer?<sup>1</sup>*

Perhaps we can better appreciate the message of Hebrews 8 when we contrast it with the message of our culture. There can be no forgiveness because there is nothing to forgive. There can be no justice, because there is no moral wrong. There can be no final answers in life because there is no final answer—the heavens are empty, and all we have are our own cries to console us. As Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote:

*So runs my dream, but what am I?  
An infant crying in the night  
An infant crying for the light  
And with no language but a cry.<sup>2</sup>*

According to the author of Hebrews, God has answered our cries—our cries for justice, for mercy, and for peace. Jesus Christ is God's answer, and through him we have a priest who forgives our sin through his own blood and reconciles us to a God who is never silent.

- Why do we need to be reconciled to God?

- How has Jesus reconciled us to God?
- How can we respond to Jesus?
- In what ways can we obey Jesus today?

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam, <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/books/tennyson/tennyson04.html> (accessed 11/22/19)