# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God’s New Covenant”**

**2 Corinthians 3:4-6**

**April 26, 2020**

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ’s death on the cross was for our sake, for by his death our sin can be forgiven and we can enter into a new relationship with God. And, having been forgiven and renewed, we will be raised into eternal life with Christ. How is this possible? How can this forgiveness be ours, and how can we be sure that we will enjoy eternal life with God in heaven? The apostle Paul tells us how we can be sure in his letter to the church in the city of Corinth. I am reading 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

Paul is confident that his sins are forgiven, and Paul is confident that he will be raised from the dead, because of God’s new covenant. What is a covenant? A covenant is like a partnership. In the old covenant, which we learn about in the Old Testament of the Bible, God partnered with his people so that they might know him and have a relationship with him. In that old covenant, the people were given the laws of God and they agreed to keep those laws. The problem was that they were not up to the task. They consistently disobeyed God, breaking their commitment to their partnership with God. In the new covenant, however, God gives his Holy Spirit to his people to nurture their relationship with God and to empower them for his purposes. So it is that Paul tells us that our covenant with God is no longer one of written laws but of the Spirit.

Paul had experienced both the old and the new covenant in his life’s journey. When he was still living according to the old covenant, trying his best to be the kind of person who pleases God through his own efforts, he counted on several things about himself. In his letter to the Philippians he tells us that he counted on his ancestry, for he came from a devout Jewish family. He also counted on his careful observance of all the religious requirements of Judaism, trying hard not to break any of the rules. Third, he said that he worked as hard as anyone to please God. And, lastly, he was morally upright. So, all in all, he saw himself as a really good person, doing his very best to make himself acceptable to God. But, he came to realize that he wasn’t able to do it well enough. He may have been better at it than others, but he knew he still sinned, that he still did some of those things that God didn’t want him to do. In another letter he writes: “What a wretched man I am. Though I know the right thing to do, I sometimes find myself doing the wrong thing. What am I going to do?” He knew that he had broken his covenant with God, and he knew that the consequence of that breaking was eternal separation from God.

Then Paul discovered that God had made a new covenant with us through his Son, Jesus Christ. While the old partnership required trying to perfectly keep all the rules, the new partnership was being offered to anyone who wanted to believe it and receive it. Jesus spoke about this new partnership with God on the night before he died on the cross. While having dinner with his disciples, he used the cup of wine as a symbol and said: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood for the forgiveness of sin.” The purpose of his death was to do for us what we can’t do for ourselves – that is, to secure the forgiveness of our sin. If the old covenant can be summarized by the word “try,” the new covenant is entered into through the word “trust.” All we need to do to join this new partnership with God is to trust that Jesus has done what is needed, and God will take care of the rest. He will forgive us, because of what Jesus has done. He will save us, because of what Jesus has done. He will raise us from the dead into eternal life, because of what Jesus has done.

The difference between the old and the new covenant is the difference between human inadequacy and Godly adequacy. As Paul says in the text I read earlier, we human beings are unable to qualify ourselves. We are inadequate to the task of old covenant obedience. When I was serving as a junior high minister in my early twenties, I met weekly with my supervisor. During one of those meeting he mentioned that I had seemed troubled lately, unsure of myself and unhappy with how the ministry was going. At first I didn’t want to be open with him, but I finally told him that I felt I wasn’t doing a very good job with the youth, or the volunteer leaders, or the parents. I felt inadequate.

On the one hand, I had every reason to feel inadequate. I still had a lot to learn, I was making some bad decisions, and I was getting some negative feedback about the ministry. In old covenant language, I was trying my best and failing. But, as my supervisor assured me, failure and inadequacy were not reasons for believing that I was unworthy. There were things to work on, to be sure, but they were not required in order to justify myself as the church’s junior high minister. He believed that I was the right person for the job, and the Senior Pastor of the church believed I was the right person for the job, and they would do all they could to support and encourage me. In new covenant language, I was being invited to trust them that I was worthy of the position.

How can you believe that God considers you worthy of being in this new partnership with him? Well, what do you do when you need to determine if you can trust someone? You look them in the eye. Imagine looking into the eyes of Jesus as he dies on the cross for your sins. See the pain and the suffering in his face as he bears your sin, and see the love and the compassion in his eyes that says: “I do this for you for you are worth it to me. Will you trust me for the forgiveness of your sin and for your life after death?”