



March 3, 2019
The New Covenant
2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6
Pastor Phil Ward

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for reading this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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This is our last week of the campaign. We've been focusing on the campaign for the last 6 weeks. This is our 7th week. The aim of this series was to encourage you to become better Bible readers, and also to experience who God is, and the great love He has for us. Because He is a God who is faithful, who keeps His promises.

Many people have told us that they have learned exactly that. They are starting to understand scripture in a better way, in a clearer way. We are praising the Lord for that.

This week we'll focus on the New Covenant. Last week we talked about the Davidic Covenant and how God had promised an offspring to David, who would build a temple. That was Solomon. God also promised to David, a dynasty which means he would have offspring who would carry on, not only the name of David, but also the important task of reigning over an everlasting kingdom and also an everlasting throne. God also said, if any of the kings who came after David committed sin and didn't repent, that God would discipline them.

The whole Old Testament history from that point forward is all about how the kings, starting with Solomon actually did not remain loyal to the covenant. The kingdom was divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms. The Northern was taken into exile by Assyria, and round 722 BC, the Southern Kingdom was taken into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar. In about 586 BC, when King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, he destroyed the temple and broke down the walls of Jerusalem, and exported all of the nobility and very important people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You know that story perhaps, in the book of Daniel. While they were in exile, having lost their identity, having lost everything that represented them, all they found valuable and significant about who they were – the temple, Jerusalem – we read about a prophet named Jeremiah, who writes: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness." The question is how can such a people, when they have lost so much, how in the world can they maintain the posture and thinking of God that He is faithful? That His love is new and His mercies are great? How do they do that in the midst of their bleak circumstances?

The answer is: because they clung to the promises of God.

What God promised while the people were in exile, and leading up to exile, was a new covenant. We read it in Jeremiah 31:31-35 –

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² 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, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Then, there is another prophet, Ezekiel who writes about the promise of the New Covenant in his book. Ezekiel 36:25-27

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is the word of the Lord. Let’s pray:

Father, we thank You so much for gathering us together as Your church, having studied these covenants for these weeks, now we ask that in this culmination, this moment this morning, that You would do for us what You promised. That is, when we gather in Your name, You will be among us, and that You will grant us all the things we need to follow You, to honor You. So God, as Your people, we ask that You would supply us in great measure, the Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts; that You would grant us the ability to think clearly about Your text, Your scripture that You have given to us, so that we may know You. So God, would You grant us these things, even the things we don’t know we need. Give them to us, we ask. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

There is a whole host of other references that refer to the New Covenant, but I’m going to trust that you’ll read about those in your workbooks! So we’ll look at these two. There are two ways to think about newness. As you know, in our community, we have a lot of new homes being built. That means that previously, there were orchards or farms or fields. No longer. It’s a trillion houses everywhere. So new houses are springing up, which means *never before existing*. There is a second way to think about newness. It is this: it is when someone gets a haircut, or gets married, and you ask them, *how does it feel?* Maybe your hair is cut short, or you get married and you ask, *how do you feel?* And they say something like, “I feel like a new man (or woman)!” You don’t look at them and gasp, saying *Oh! I thought you were somebody else! I didn’t know that you didn’t exist until this moment!* No one thinks like that. Instead, you understand that the newness is that, right now, there is something new and different, but it is connected to what came previously.

So in the New Covenant, we have to think of it in those terms. It is new. There are new things which did not exist beforehand, but there are still connections to the things that preceded it.

What are a couple of the new things? In Jeremiah 31, there are two things in verse 33 that God promises that are going to be new. He says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." So in the Old Covenant, the law was outside of the people. It was written on tablets of stone. It was exterior. But now, God is promising in the New Covenant, that the law – the word of God – will be written on the interior. Not just anywhere on the interior, it's going to be written on the tablets of their hearts. Before, the Old Covenant was written exteriorly, on tablets of stone; the New Covenant will be written on the interior, on the human heart.

The next question is, how will these promises affect those who are in it? How will the New Covenant affect those who are in it? That's where we find Ezekiel 36:25, that God first promises a cleansing of idols. He says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you." It's an interesting promise in the New Covenant.

One aspect of the New Covenant that you should expect to experience, is the cleansing work of God to remove idols from your heart. What are idols? Many of us think of idols as little statues made of ivory or wood, or other stuff. But idols can be virtually anything.

I love what Pastor Michael Lawrence describes it: "An idol is anything or anyone without which you can't be happy or fulfilled." An idol is the answer to the question: *If I didn't have this, what reason do I have to live tomorrow?* That's your idol. He goes on to say, "We can make an idol out of almost anything – sex, money, power, peoples' opinions of us, security, comfort, control, convenience. All of these things can be idols, but our favorite idol is – ourselves.

I am my favorite idol. You are your favorite idol, and we all want others to worship our favorite idol too! The fact is (Pastor Lawrence writes), "We were created to worship. If we won't worship God, we'll end up worshipping something else. But there is no human being who worships nothing."

We all worship something. The question is, what? The New Covenant promises that we will be cleansed of our idols. That means our hearts will be so reoriented and transformed by the Word of God, being written upon them, that the worship that we ascribe to idols will be transformed. Instead of worshipping the things that God has created, we will worship God as the ultimate creator. In so doing, our loves and affections will be reoriented toward God and others. Remember, the chief idol is self. So if God reorients our hearts, then that means we no longer look inwardly and put ourselves first. Instead, we put God first and others, and that's why God says to love Me and love your neighbor. That's what it means to be in the New Covenant – to have the Spirit in such a way that you can love your neighbor and love God just as He commanded.

How will that come about? Ezekiel 36:26-27

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you

God says *I will put it there! I will remove the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you.* That means God will give us new hearts so that our desires and our longings will be oriented toward God and the things of God. It does not mean we won't enjoy the things of the world, but we will enjoy them for God's sake. God will remove our dead heart and give us a heart that is alive. Our passions, our interests, our desires, our wants – will be radically reoriented, off of ourselves and onto those outside of ourselves, namely God and our neighbor.

Remember what Jesus said: "For the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many." Jesus Himself depicts what it looks like to be under the New Covenant.

When we have the Spirit, what will happen to us? (Ezekiel 36:27) ^{“27} And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

The Holy Spirit is given to us under the New Covenant, and the effect of that is obedience. God will cause that to happen. It is important to realize that we are given both a new heart (which reorients our longings and desires, it reorients the things we treasure) and the Spirit (meaning, not only do we have new affections and desires, but the things we want and desire – the things of God – and we want to obey God. Not out of reluctance or hesitancy, but we are in effect, eager to worship God because of the Spirit who indwells us.)

So no wonder why Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The New Covenant does not mean that there are no commands or obedience. The New Covenant means that those things are not drudgery. They are delightful to those who have new hearts in the Spirit. Nobody goes kicking and screaming in obedience to God when they are in the New Covenant. That’s what God promised.

So the New Covenant is a profoundly inward-directed covenant, that produces an explosion of outward action in the form of radical and delightful obedience to God and love of neighbors. That’s what the New Covenant promises.

The apostle refers to the New Covenant as “the ministry of the Spirit.” No wonder he calls it that, because we are promised the Spirit to empower us to obey. So let’s turn to 2 Corinthians 3:1-3. We’ll see Paul defending himself and those who work with him, about their ministries. Defending their ministry because he is being accused of twisting scripture. He is being accused of being unimpressive and un-entertaining, and not very engaging. They say he is a mere talker with no power. I know what Paul went through because I’ve had people tell me – *Phil, if you could just tell more stories and jokes, I would really love your preaching!* The reality is, I’m not a court jester. I’m not here to entertain you. I’m not here to tell jokes. You can go to Netflix and find stand-up comedians. This is church. This is the word of God. This is how people are transformed. Not by giggling themselves to death, but being reborn and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. (applause)

How does Paul defend his ministry? (2 Corinthians 3:1-3)

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? [in other words, am I trying to defend myself and show that I’m worthwhile, that I have it all together?] Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. ³ And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

We see that Paul is saying – do you want a recommendation for whether or not my ministry is legitimate? I’ll give it to you. Look at your heart! Because upon your heart, written with the Holy Spirit, is authored by Jesus a letter. Therefore, Jesus authors a letter of recommendation that authenticates Paul’s ministry. That letter was written by the Spirit, upon the heart of the Christian. So if you want to know whether or not my ministry is real, look at the person’s heart. For the outcome and condition of their heart is the evidence. The evidence that Christ, as the author, has written by the Spirit the simple phrase: *MINE. That heart it mine. I wrote it. I sealed it with the Holy Spirit. That heart is mine.*

Then Paul describes for us what the New Covenant is, a covenant of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 –

⁴ Such is the confidence that we [Paul and his company, perhaps Titus] have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient [adequate, able, gifted] in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency [competency, giftedness] is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant [what is the covenant like? He goes on ...], not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

In other words, the Old Covenant, of Moses, was the letter of the law. Whereas, the New Covenant is the ministry of the Spirit and it is not about death, where the letter kills, but about life. So the ministry of the New Covenant is a ministry of the Spirit, in which the Spirit gives life. That's a huge contrast for Paul.

Then he goes on to talk about glory. Glory is the idea of beauty, grandeur, majesty, value, goodness, worth. Paul puts it this way (2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 11)

⁷ Now if the ministry of death [the ministry of the letter, the Old Covenant], carved in letters on stone [the Ten Commandments], came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory [beauty, grandeur, majesty, value, worth], which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?

In other words, wouldn't the New Covenant, which is not about death, but life – have more beauty, more grandeur, more majesty, more value, since life is obviously better than death? I don't know anyone who would value death over life. When we encounter people who prefer death over life, we usually request counseling for them. Because we all know that life is better! Paul then contrasts the ministry of death with the ministry of life. He says in 2 Corinthians 3:9)

⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

In other words, the letter of the law is going to kill you because we all break the covenant and we all are transgressors before God. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Now if that is majestic and beautiful and awesome – how much more glorious, more awesome, more majestic, more beautiful – is the ministry that tells you that you don't have to die! You get LIFE! So much better!

2 Corinthians 3:11 – Paul says, “¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.” The glory of the New Covenant exceeds the glory of the Old Covenant. Because the Old Covenant was a ministry of death. The New Covenant is a ministry of life. The New Covenant has more glory because it is permanent. It is not fading away. So we know, when Jesus says, those He has redeemed, we are in His hands. When we are in the hands of Jesus, He says there is no power or authority that could ever pluck you from My hands. So it's a permanent ministry of life, brought about by the Spirit.

Remember, the brightness of the moon is always surpassed by the brightness of the sun. The moon is bright at night, but when the sun rises, none of us goes looking for the light of the moon, because we have the sun. We have the New Covenant. We have the Spirit; let's not go back.

What happens when the New Covenant comes? Paul turns our attention to the New Covenant, and our hope and experience. He says the hope is the hope of glory, as he says in Colossians, the hope of glory, the hope of God's promises coming to fruition that emboldens us, not like Moses. He says, (2 Corinthians 3:12-15)

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

When people read the Old Covenant, for those under it, there is a veil that lies over both their minds and their hearts. They cannot see. The veil is over their mind – they cannot understand. The veil is over their hearts so they cannot want and feel. So the question is, why is it that way? Because only through Christ, the Messiah, is it taken away.

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.

Jump to chapter 4:3-4 – you can see the effects of being veiled (blinded). Paul says --

³ And even if our gospel is veiled [even if they can't understand the gospel with their minds and hearts], it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The blinding effect of the veil which lies upon minds and hearts of those who are perishing in unbelief, is that they cannot see the good news, the joy of the good news for all the people, nor the glory of Christ which is the beauty of Christ, which is the majesty of Christ, which is the grandeur of Christ and all the worth of Christ. They cannot see it! He is just some dude! He is some religious teacher. Just a moralistic, therapeutic home boy. But He definitely is not worthy of worship (to those who are perishing).

So the question is how do I get this veil taken away? How does Jesus become beautiful and majestic and awesome? How is the veil removed? How can I go from perishing to living? 2 Corinthians 3:16 --

¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. “

Remember, in verse 15 we see that it is only through Christ that the veil is removed. So if you turn to Him, the veil is removed. That's how the Bible describes repentance. Repentance is the act when one turns from something toward something else. I think the best example we find in scripture is probably 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 we read, where Paul is referring to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, which are the Philippians and the Corinthians. He says:

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you [the Thessalonians], and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

That is repentance and also how it looks when the New Covenant comes upon a people. They are worshipping their idols, but in repentance, they have turned from their idols of self and convenience and safety and comfort, and they have turned toward the Lord. They see that the Lord is of more value and more beauty and more grandeur and more life-giving than these things. When they turn to the Lord, it isn't just, flippant. It says they turn to the Lord in order to serve the living and true God.

Remember, the Spirit comes upon you and **causes** you to walk in obedience. Nobody can turn from their sin and their idols and turn to the Lord and continue to walk in disobedience. Nobody can do that! When we turn to the Lord, we begin to serve the Lord. It says, “those who are waiting for Jesus from

heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come,” that’s part of what it means to repent – you repent and you believe the gospel (v 10) you believe that Jesus delivers us from the wrath of God. Jesus is crucified and risen. No wonder why Jesus preached, “The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.”

That’s how you get in the New Covenant. Now, what is the gospel?

God has sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a virgin, so that He did not inherit Adam’s sin nature (we talked about it in the Adamic Covenant). He lived a sinless life for us, keeping God’s law in every way, so that the law would be upheld for us. Jesus was also crucified on a cross to bear the curse of the law for us. So although we are guilty offenders, He took upon Himself the consequences for our law-breaking sin. On the cross, Jesus bore the full wrath of God for us. So Jesus died, the just consequences for sin. However, that’s not the end of the story. Jesus rose from the dead to demonstrate that He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and that evil and Satan and death itself will one day come to a glorious and final end when He returns to establish His kingdom in finality and fullness. So therefore, Jesus has done everything necessary to rescue sinners like you and I from the wrath of God. He has secured eternal righteousness through His obedience. He has secured eternal forgiveness through His shed blood. He has secured eternal life through His resurrection.

Therefore, if you will trust that Jesus is enough, and that He has done all that is necessary – if you trust that – then God will rescue you and ransom you from His just wrath because of your sin, and you will repent of your idols and turn to God, so that you may be saved.

I implore you, brothers and sisters, remember the gospel when you wake up, day in and day out. Every day, recount it. Recite it. The gospel – Christ is for me! Not against me! If you’re not yet a Christian, I implore you – repent and believe the gospel! Turn from your sins and your idols, for those will never satisfy and put your trust in Jesus, for whom we are created and in whom we have our utmost delight. He will rescue you from the wrath of God because all of the wrath of God has been poured on Him so you can be free.

That’s why Paul writes (2 Corinthians 16)

“¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face [removed when we believed in Jesus], beholding the glory [the awesomeness] of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another [that’s discipleship]. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

What is promised us is freedom, if we will turn to the Lord. Freedom from what? Freedom from condemnation, from death, from unrighteousness, from idolatry, from slavery to sin.

I’ve heard pastors use this verse to talk about how we have such freedom in Christ, and because of that freedom, you can do so many amazing things! They stand there and hype up the crowd, going “YOU HAVE FREEDOM! And people start losing their minds all craze like William Wallace in *Braveheart*. FREEDOM!! They are screaming and yelling. They go on to say, (shouting) you have freedom in Christ and you can crush your Pilates class! You can crush that job interview! You can crush that family gathering! You can crush that difficult conversation! The crowd is screaming – crazy!

I’m thinking to myself – if that’s all that Christ has purchased for us on the cross – freedom to be a good cook? That is wretched! I can google recipes. I can google how to have a good, firm handshake in a job

interview. I can google all those things, how to dominate my Pilates class. That is NOT what God has purchased for you. God has purchased for you freedom from condemnation, from death, and from the wrath of God! (applause)

So, if we have a proper understanding of the gospel, here is what happens: Jesus becomes wonderfully majestic. Jesus becomes wonderfully awesome. He becomes so valuable that you can look upon His grace and mercy and say, "I'll do anything for You!" Not in order to earn anything from You, but because I have all I need in Christ.

Therefore, whatever let the sword come. Let the famine come. Let the persecution come, for I have Christ and He is all I need.

That's when you understand the gospel. The Spirit has set you free, when you repent and believe the gospel. Brothers and sisters, Jesus didn't die, wasn't crushed on the cross under the full weight of sin in order for you to crush your Pilates class. Jesus was crushed for our iniquities. Now, we're free. OH!

How does the ministry of the Spirit of the New Covenant work? If the New Covenant is true, the promises are true that God will give you a new heart, new affections, new desire, new wants, and the Holy Spirit will be given to us and we will internally have the word of God written upon our hearts, which will cause us to obey God and to be able to see the beauty and the majesty of God. Look in 2 Corinthians 4:6 "6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The God who created everything, who spoke it into existence – everything – that same God has shone in our hearts to do what? To get the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So when you, by faith, cast your gaze upon the person of Jesus Christ, you don't just see a moralistic dude. You see the glory of God. You see the beauty of God. You see the majesty of God. You see the absolute, infinite, supreme worth of God – when you look at Jesus.

If you don't see Jesus that way, you're not in the New Covenant. Or else, scripture is a lie. Those are our options.

So we need to get in the New Covenant. How does that happen? How do you get it? Repent and believe the gospel – we already saw that. But look at the ministry of the Spirit. Ephesians 1:13-14 Paul says:

¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth [this is to Christians], the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his **glory**.

That's why we have it emblazoned in our lobby – For the praise of His Glory! We believe that Jesus is infinitely precious to us. So you receive the Holy Spirit when you hear the gospel and believe. You trust in Jesus. That's why Paul wrote (Galatians 3:2-3)

²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Obviously, his answer is – you receive the Spirit by hearing with faith.

Do you trust Jesus? Do you trust that Jesus is enough to save you from the wrath of God because of your sin? Repent and believe the gospel. How do you do that? Paul is very clear (Romans 10:9) “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [That means the other idols in your life are not lord. You repent] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead [this is the gospel], you will be saved.” That’s how simple it is. If you simply turn from your sin and you turn to God, and trust that Jesus is enough – you will be saved from the wrath of God because of your sin.

I have to point this out: to become a Muslim, you have to say, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet” three times in Arabic. BOOM! You’re a Muslim. Or, if you are Roman Catholic, and you want to be saved and make sure you get righteousness, then you have to make sure the priest is saying the right things in the right way, which makes the wine of communion and the bread of the body of Christ – literally turn into the blood and flesh of Jesus. That way, you can get saved. Or, the Roman Catholics believe that if you say the right things in the right way, you can transform basic tap water into regenerative water, which will regenerate and give life to infants.

Let me tell you – when it comes to gospel-centered Christianity, there is no magic formula. There is no incantation. There is no magic spell that you utter in order to change you and become a Christian. There is nothing like that. But the scriptures say time and time again – “repent and believe the gospel, repent and believe the gospel.” How? Confess Jesus as your Lord through repentance and believe that Jesus has risen from the dead (the gospel). Do that and you WILL be saved. It’s so simple. When that happens, the Holy Spirit comes upon you and regenerates you. He brings you to new life where once you were dead and now you are made alive (Titus 3:5) – “⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration means to be born again. That’s why Jesus said (John 3:3) “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again, you cannot see.” Notice the word “see” – remember the veil? If you are not born again by the Holy Spirit you cannot see the kingdom of God, let alone be in it! You cannot see it!

So repent and believe the gospel! It’s your only hope. For when we do that, not only are we sealed with the Spirit, but Romans 5:5 happens – we are filled with hope: “⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” It does not put us to shame – because God’s love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. If you ever want to experience the love of God, you can experience it in no other way than by the indwelling Holy Spirit who comes to us as we hear and believe the gospel, repenting of our sins and we are entered into the New Covenant, in which we are now citizens of the kingdom of God. That’s our only hope! Repent and believe the gospel!

What does this have to do with Communion? There are more details in your workbook. But let me say, every one of the covenants that we have studied has some sort of sign accompanying it. Noah and the rainbow. Abraham and circumcision. Moses and the Sabbath. David and the offspring. When we come to the New Covenant, what do we have? Baptism and Communion.

Baptism is the outward sign that an inward circumcision of the heart has been performed by the Spirit (Romans 2).

And Communion is where we take the signs of the bread and the blood, and we say this body is God sending His one and only Son in human flesh, and in His flesh, He was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Through that body which was crucified, dead and buried, He rose again with a new body. He is coming back, bodily, so that you, with this decrepit and decaying body, will receive a new and glorious resurrected body. The sign of the cup, which is the blood of Jesus, the sign of the

New Covenant, which is the promise of total forgiveness, if you will repent and believe the gospel. Communion is not only a sign, but a corporate meal. If you see in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul talks about Communion (11:17-18), he talks about the fact that the church comes together, the church gathers, it's a corporate meal. It's something we do together. We are to look outwardly and recognize that we are not alone in this. This is not your private moment. This is a moment in which we, as the children of God come together and eat a meal. It's corporate.

Not only that, but Communion reminds us (Ephesians 2:22) that in Christ we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. That's one of the effects of the New Covenant – we're in this together. None of this radical Americanized individuality when it comes to Christianity! You can't be a Christian by yourself! Literally! That's what the Bible says. If you want to, you're not a Christian. The Christian is the Spirit in you, uniting you not only to Christ, but uniting you to one another. We're together. That's why it's absurd to gossip about each other, or slander each other. We're family. Why would you hurt your own body? It makes no sense.

Communion is also a covenant renewal meal. In the Old Testament, the covenants were renewed from time to time, where the people would pledge themselves to God and remember His great mercy for them. In response, they would commit themselves once again to God. So when we come Communion, we're doing a covenant renewal ceremony, where you and I are gathering together and corporately we're saying that we are remembering the covenant. We are committing ourselves once again, to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. That's what is so beautiful about Communion: the reality that we have been made right with God through Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:15-18 --

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, (quoting Jeremiah 31:)

¹⁶ "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

¹⁷ then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

When we come to Communion, it's not a time to get right with God, it's a time that we remember that through Christ, we **have been made** right with God. Big difference.

Lastly, Communion causes us to look backward, inward and forward. Not only do we look outward because of the corporate nature of Communion, but we look backward to the cross, that Jesus was spiked to a cross and through His blood shed there, there is forgiveness of sins for all who would repent and believe.

We also look inward (1 Corinthians 11:28) ²⁸ "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." It means we need to pause and take inventory – Am I in the New Covenant? If not, repent and believe the gospel. If so, praise God! As Martin Luther said, continue to live in repentance, for all of life is repentance. Continue to believe the gospel.

And we look forward, because this is what it says (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ¹⁰ "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

So we say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" That's what this meal is about. That's how it signifies the New Covenant. So we have the privilege today to spend some time at the Lord's table, celebrating Jesus Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Father, we thank You so much for this morning. We thank You that we are able to wake up and be here. I pray that as we, as a church, come together to celebrate communally this Communion. I pray that You will bless us, that You will pour out the Spirit in abundance, that we would have unveiled faces and eyes, and that we would be able to see Your glory and beauty and majesty, that You would do these things for us because you promised them in the New Covenant. So God, I pray for those who are not yet in the New Covenant. Would You grant them repentance, that they may repent and believe the gospel? And for those of us who know You, may we spend this time celebrating all that You are for us in Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.