

**COVENANT OF THE HEART**  
**Lenten Series on: "From Old to New" –Hebrews 10: 8-18 –March 10, 2013**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

We are The Church of the Covenant. That's our name. Have you ever wondered what that really means? Pastor Emily and I have been preaching in Lent about moving from Old to New, from old views of being church to new views of being church. We have been unpacking this through our study of the New Testament book of Hebrews where the author is endeavoring to speak to a Jewish-Christian Church and to explain to them what it means that Jesus has come and made the one time, all sufficient sacrifice for the reconciliation of God and man...*once for all*. Hebrews is trying to explain what it means to move from a performance based religion to a presence based religion, from old to new...

For me this has a deep personal significance. Because part of my spiritual journey has been a movement out of the law and into grace; out of the practice of law and into the practice of ministry. As you know, I left law school and felt called to go into ministry. But it was more than just changing careers; it was a spiritual journey as well. Because when I was young I was very performance based in my view of people and of God; I was a good son and a good person; I went to church; I wasn't like all those other people who were bad people; I was a good person; I measured up; I tried hard and harder than everyone else; I got good grades; I wanted to please my teachers; I wanted to please my parents; I wanted to do right in the presence of God. And somewhere deep in my heart I believed that if I was just good enough, everything would go right for me in my life, I would be blessed and successful, and I would have a right relationship with God and get to go to heaven, because I was good. It was the dead hand of legalism, an If Then relationship with God –"IF I was good, then I would be blessed". Old Covenant, not New Covenant. And my spiritual journey led me, not just out of the law, but out of legalism, and into being in a right, life-giving relationship with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a long story, but it is summarized in my ministry life verse from 2 Corinthians 3: 5-6 where it states: *"the written code (the law) kills, but the Spirit gives life."* The law kills the human spirit, but the Holy Spirit gives us life. It is inscribed in the ring I wear --**The law kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

Covenant means relationship. It is the way in which we are in relationship to God. In Old Testament times the relationship with God was forged through the law. Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai and the people of God were to obey the law and this obedience was the way in which their relationship with God was retained. If you obeyed, you were in relationship with God. If you disobeyed the law, you broke your relationship with God. If you obeyed the law, you were blessed. If you disobeyed the law, you were cursed. It was completely conditional –IF you obeyed, THEN you were blessed. It was completely performance based –OBEDIENCE to the law produced the blessing. Disobedience produced the curse. You needed to be a good person and try very very hard in order to be in a right relationship with God. The problem with the Old Covenant is that there was no love within it. And there was not enough blood of animals shed that could ever hope to atone for our sin and make us right with God. A huge problem for us today is how performance based and conditional is our love and acceptance of one another. Love is --I accept you as you are. Love is --I love you when you do what I want and deeper love is when I love you when you do not do what I want you to do. I love you when you are perfect and I love you when you err and sin. But that's not the Old Testament law; that's not the Old Covenant. If I may say, there are far too many Christians and far too many Presbyterians who are stuck in an Old Testament style legalism that is performance based, that is conditional, that will love someone else IF and WHEN they do what we want them to do, but will reject them when they do not do what we want them to do. **The law kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

By contrast the New Covenant is a new relationship. It is the new relationship we have with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, and it is radically different. The New Covenant that we have is established through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Every communion service I say the words of Jesus, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which is shed for the remission of sin..." Jesus Christ as God in the flesh was able to live the one, perfect, holy and sinless life. In perfect obedience He went to the cross; His blood was shed at Calvary; His blood made the atonement for our sin ONCE for ALL; His one sinless and perfect life sacrificed upon the cross reconciled us once and for all to His Father in heaven; He paid the price in full; His obedience did what our trying to be obedient could never do – fulfill the just requirements of the law. We have a perfectly restored relationship with God the Father because of the perfect obedience to the law of Jesus, God the Son. What we could never do, God did for us in the person of His Son. The New Covenant is unlike the Old in that it is not performance based; there is nothing we can do to win God's favor – Jesus has already done that for us on our behalf. The New Covenant is UNCONDITIONAL, there is no "If" "Then" about it; IF you obey then I will love you – NO! Jesus loves us when we obey and when we disobey; Jesus loves us when we understand and when we do not understand; Jesus loves us and goes to the cross "when we were yet sinners" and does something for us that thousands and thousands of years of the dead hand of legalism could never do – restore completely and totally the broken relationship, the broken covenant, with God, broken through our sin and disobedience. **The law kills but the Spirit gives life.**

Our scripture from Hebrews 10: 16 is a quote from the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah found in Jeremiah 31: 31ff. It is God speaking prophetically of the coming NEW COVENANT that will be unlike the Old Covenant. Hebrews quotes: "*I will put my laws on their hearts...*" (Hebrews 10: 16 and Jeremiah 31: 33) The way Jeremiah put it is as he predicted the new way God was going to relate to His people was this: "*This is the covenant which I will make...I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...*" The LAW will be written upon our hearts. Please note that Jesus has not come to throw out the Old Testament Law; no, if you were in the Dr. Jim Platt class on "The Sermon on the Mount" you would know that Jesus Christ is the "fulfillment" of the law; not one jot nor tittle will pass away from the law because of Jesus, but that it becomes fulfilled in HIM. His perfect obedience and His shed blood fulfills the law once for all. What Jesus did at Calvary wipes away the just requirements of the law, once for all. He fulfilled it; He did it for us; what we could never do for ourselves – be perfectly obedient to God and follow the law perfectly – He did once for all. But then we invite Jesus Christ in; we invite Him to come and indwell our heart; we ask the Holy Spirit to come and indwell us with the living presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And He does come and He does take up residency within. When He comes He brings His perfect obedience to the law with Him; as we follow Him personally; as our personal relationship with Him grows and grows each day (because He is with us and in us and around us and through us) we begin to understand what His perfect obedience is like and we want to please Him and be with Him. As we do this, more and more each day, we desire to do and to be, what He desires us to do and to be. It is not conditional; the dead hand of legalism is gone; Jesus doesn't say to us "If you obey me THEN I will bless and love you". No, we come to know He loves us, period, end of story. And we come to love Him more and more each day. We WANT to do what HE WANTS us to do. That is how the law is written upon the heart. The New Covenant is UNCONDITIONAL – He loves us and gives us grace as a gift. It is not performance based, as in, we have to do what He wants us to or He will not love us, it is relationship based. The Spirit comes and brings Jesus alive in our heart and our relationship with God is restored because of our relationship with His Son. The Old Covenant is performance based; the New Covenant is presence based – the presence of Jesus alive within. **The law kills but the Spirit gives life!**

I have grown tired and weary of the Church of Jesus Christ that should be in the New Covenant but constantly reverts to the Old. That sits around judging people instead of bringing them into a life giving relationship with Jesus; that engages in a boatload of moralizing and finger pointing and tut-tut-tutting; that tries to work its way up to God without Jesus; that says it believes in Jesus but acts like its still stuck under the dead hand of the Old Testament law. That tries to make the love of Jesus CONditional when it is Unconditional; that makes the love of God conditioned upon a performance based life, meaning we can never measure up, never meet the standard, never think we can fulfill the law and be the person we think God wants us to be. I'm so tired of that, aren't you? Beloved, we can never please God apart from Jesus. Maybe we just need to invite the Holy Spirit in; maybe we just need to ask Jesus to take up full residency within our heart; maybe then we might finally and fully believe that we are loved and accepted, totally and unconditionally, by what Jesus has done for us, that we could never do for ourselves, once and for all. Because –THE LAW KILLS THE HUMAN SPIRIT –BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE! Church of the Covenant, BE the church of the *New Covenant*. **For the law kills, but the Spirit gives life.** Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Relationship, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*