

God Confirms Us
1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
John Breon

Whenever we baptize someone, it's an opportunity for us all to remember our baptism, renew our faith in Jesus Christ, and experience God's grace afresh. When the church confirms people, it's a time to recall how we came to know Christ and to recommit ourselves to living in covenant with God.

Baptism initiates us into the family of God, the Church. Sometimes Confirmation and Baptism are simultaneous. For other people who are baptized as infants, Confirmation follows Baptism by some years. Confirmation is a time to claim for ourselves what was claimed on our behalf in baptism. In Confirmation we accept for ourselves the gift that was given in our baptism. Our faith is personal, we believe for ourselves. And our faith is public as we profess to the church that we do believe and that we choose to follow Jesus in the company of a congregation.

Confirmation is one step along the way of following Jesus. It's an important step, but it's not the only one. It's not the only decision or commitment we make in our life with God. Confirmation is one experience of grace among many. All through our lives, at every turn, God offers grace. We can receive it and grow and walk on in the adventure of being disciples of Jesus.

In these two passages from the apostle Paul's writing to the church in Corinth, he uses a word that can be translated *confirm*, strengthen, sustain, verify, establish. God confirms the message of the gospel and God confirms people who believe the gospel message and trust God.

Paul says that the testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. When someone comes to know Christ as they put their faith in him, the gospel is confirmed. The grace of God gives this confirmation. This is God's grace that's always already present everywhere with everyone. When we respond to grace and receive it, it takes a specific form in our lives. It makes us God's people. God expresses grace in us through gifts that help us be and do what God wants.

So God confirms the gospel among us. What is the gospel? It's the good news of God's saving action through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. I say it often: the gospel is *good news, bad news, good news*.

The first good news is that God creates and calls people to relate to God, to know God, to represent God, to reflect God's glory to creation and reflect creation's praise to God. That's what we're made for. That's who we're meant to be.

The bad news is that humans chose, we choose, to try to be like God on our own instead of in relationship with God. We want to determine for ourselves what's right and wrong. We give up being what God intends. We turn from worshiping the true and living God and give allegiance to created things that were never meant to be worshiped. All of this twists and corrupts God's good creation, including us. It keeps us from knowing God as we should. It keeps us from living the way God intends. The word for all this bad news is *sin*.

But the second good news is about God's grace and God's purpose to rescue, redeem, and restore people—and all of creation. God comes in Jesus Christ to show us the way, to teach us, to lead us. Jesus is fully human and fully God. If he's not fully human, his power and grace don't come all the way to us. They're always beyond us. If he's not fully God, he can't save us; he doesn't have what it takes to rescue us and bring us back. But he is fully God and he is fully human and he can do all of that for us.

In Jesus' death on the cross, God takes on himself all the sin and brokenness of humanity. He absorbs the worst that evil can do and he defeats it. Then, God raises Jesus from the dead to vindicate him and show that he was true and right all along. The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of new creation. It introduces a new kind of life into the world. The power that raised Jesus is available to us now. And Jesus' resurrection is the promise of what God will do for all his people and everything he's made at the end when Jesus appears again with glory and God's kingdom is fully realized.

The good news connects with us through God's grace. Grace is God's love and favor. It's also the active power of God's love. It's the work of God's Holy Spirit. Grace goes before us and comes before we're aware of it

or accept it. When we do become aware and accept God's grace, the gift of salvation, through faith, we're put right with God. God restores us to a right relationship with himself. God starts the work of new creation in us. Grace keeps us going on and growing. The Holy Spirit is transforming us, making us to be more like Jesus in character and commitment.

Salvation is all by grace but it comes to us through faith. We can either receive or reject the gift God offers. Even our ability to receive is enabled by grace, but it's we who do the receiving.

When we receive God's gift through faith, there's confirmation that God's good news is true and right. The witness of all the people who share the good news with us is confirmed.

God not only confirms the message, but God also confirms us and keeps confirming us fully, to the end. This present and ongoing confirming that God does is a little clearer in the passage from 2 Corinthians. There Paul says that his word, his personal integrity, is not "yes and no," just as Jesus isn't "yes and no." In Jesus, it's always "yes." All of God's promises are yes in Christ. Again, we make a response. We say "Amen" through Jesus to the glory of God. *Amen* is an affirmation, an agreement, a commitment to what God says, to what God does in Jesus.

God is the one who makes Paul and his associates and the Corinthians and all believers stand firm. God confirms us, strengthens and establishes us, in Christ. As God is confirming us, he has anointed us. God put his Holy Spirit on us and made us Jesus people. "Christ" means anointed. Jesus is the Anointed One. We are the anointed community, the body of Christ, made to be like him and represent him. God also set his seal of ownership on us. We're stamped with God's claim and call on us. And God put his Spirit in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is God living in his people. And that's the down payment, the guarantee of what is yet to come, of all that God will do.

God does this for us together, in community, as the church, the body of Christ. We're not confirmed, we're not strong by ourselves, but together. I've heard about different kinds of trees that share root systems or their roots are connected, so they stand together; they support each other and nurture each other. That's a good picture of the church.

God gives specific ways to experience and share his grace all through our life with him now. God promises to meet us and work in and through us when we engage in these practices with faith and love. We talk about *works of piety* that help us connect with God. These include studying and meditating on Scripture, praying, fasting, worship, sharing our faith, participating in Communion. There are also *works of mercy* where we care for others. These include visiting the sick and the prisoners, feeding the hungry, giving generously, seeking justice, working to end oppression and discrimination, helping the poor. There are many means of grace and gifts of grace that enable us to grow and serve, to be transformed and to be instruments of God's transforming grace in the world.

Back in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that God will confirm us to the end so we'll be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus appears again in all his glory, we'll be able to stand with him because of God's grace, because of the Holy Spirit's work all through our lives, because we've become the kind of people who can live in God's glorious presence.

Our response of faith and our continued faithfulness are important in all this. But they're not the most important. "God is faithful," Paul says. God's faithfulness is most important. God is true and trustworthy. God's faithfulness inspires our faithfulness. God's commitment to us makes us able to be committed to God.

We can experience and receive God's love and faithfulness, grace and gifts anytime, anywhere. But Baptism and Confirmation give us an opportunity to experience and receive and celebrate God's love and faithfulness, God's grace and gifts in our lives and in the church.

Will you say "Amen" to God's promises? "Yes" to all that God offers in Jesus Christ through the present working of the Holy Spirit? Will you say yes to forgiveness? Yes to new life? Yes to faith and commitment? Yes to a life lived with God, in Christ? Yes to belonging to the community of faith? Yes to life forever in God's glorious presence in the new creation?