

Membership Matters: The Church Covenant¹

Prospective Members' Class
12 February 2006
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Sunday School
Deuteronomy 5-6

Introduction: Welcome to the second week of our two week "jump start" course on Church Membership. The title of this mini-series is called "Membership Matters." We'll be covering the Church Covenant today.

These classes are primarily for prospective members, but I believe every member of our church needs to hear what their responsibilities are.

The idea of a church covenant comes from Deuteronomy 5 and 6. The Law is given in Deuteronomy 5, and the people make a covenant to obey it in the sixth chapter.

What is a Church Covenant?

A church covenant is a promise.

- A promise made to God.
- A promise made to a local church.
- A promise made to one's self.

A church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live.

- While our Statement of Faith is a good summary of what we believe, our church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live – more importantly, it is a summary of how God would have us live. It does not include every explicit command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ.

A church covenant is a sign of commitment.

- A sign of commitment to God.
- A sign of commitment to His church.
- A sign of commitment to personal holiness.

A church covenant is an ethical statement.

- One church historian wrote this,
"A church covenant is a series of written pledges based on the Bible which church members voluntarily make to God and to one another regarding their basic moral and spiritual commitments and the practice of their faith."
(Baptist Church Covenants, page VIII, Charles W. DeWeese)
- One theologian calls church covenants the "ethical counterpart to confessions of faith." A church covenant can be an important part of applying a Christian worldview to every aspect of our lives. Inherent in the purpose of a church covenant is the understanding that church

¹ This material is adapted from Mark Dever's books *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2004) and *The Deliberate Church* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2005).

membership involves being held accountable to live in a manner consistent with a common understanding of Scripture.

A church covenant is a biblical standard.

- A covenant is helpful in a church that is practicing Biblical church discipline (more on this subject at the end of this talk and in the next session). Simply put: As members of a church, we exhort one another to live holy lives, and we challenge brothers and sisters persisting in sin. We need a biblical, agreed upon standard by which to rightly judge and exhort each other when unrepentant sin exists in the church.

Our basic covenant responsibilities are reflected in the Ten Commandments.

1. **GOD FIRST:** We agree to worship only the one true and living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will have no other gods before Him. God is more important than our jobs, than our wealth, than our ambitions, goals, and dreams.
2. **NO IDOLATRY:** We agree to worship God in His appointed way and to exclude from our worship anything that He has not appointed. No CCM, deviant worship, such as Jeroboam!
3. **PROTECT THE WORTH OF GOD'S NAME:** We agree not to use the name of our God emptyly or to take it upon ourselves carelessly, but to walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Must have the right kind of music.
4. **KEEP THE LORD'S SABBATH HOLY.** We agree to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, if they are not works of mercy, piety, or necessity, and to positively sanctify the day by special exercises of public and private worship. Always in church when the doors are opened unless providentially hindered.
5. **SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES AS UNTO THE LORD.** We agree to honor and obey, within the bounds of Scripture, all our superiors, whether in family, church, state, or business; and, if we be superiors, to deal reasonably and lovingly with our subordinates and thus to teach them by word and example to fear God and keep His commandments.
6. **PROMOTE LIFE AND GOD'S CREATION (IMAGE). (Don't kill)** We agree to avoid whatever tends to destroy us or our neighbors and to engage vigorously in all lawful endeavors to preserve our own lives and the lives of others, especially by ready reconciliation and faithful exhortation in the church.
7. **KEEP PURE. (Don't commit adultery)** We agree to possess our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and to avoid all uncleanness of thought, speech, or action. Women and men dress modestly. We don't use wordly music, etc.

8. **BE DILIGENT AND WORK AS UNTO THE LORD. (Don't steal)** We agree to be diligent in our vocations, that we may provide for our own households, avoid theft of time, money, or goods, and have to give to him who has need.
9. **TELL THE TRUTH ALWAYS (Don't lie).** We agree to earnestly promote truth among men and to avoid anything that would prejudice the truth or injure our neighbor's good name.
10. **BE CONTENT AND HAPPY IN GOD (Don't covet)** We agree to be fully content with our own condition in life, to rejoice in the advancement of our neighbor, and to avoid envying him or coveting anything that is his.

Our church covenant is really a summary of Christian responsibilities in the New Testament.

Church Covenant of Tabernacle Baptist Church

God, by His sovereign grace and omnipotent love alone, has led me to repent of my sin and believe on Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone as my Savior and Lord. As one who has been baptized by immersion as a believer in Christ, I desire to unite with this church family. Therefore, I enter into a covenantal relationship with the members of this church. In humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit, I endeavor, so long as my conscience allows me, to pursue the following:

- (1) To meet together for any and all services on each Lord's Day, as the Lord shall give me opportunity, to serve and glorify Him in His worship, to edify one another, and to work together for the good of His church
- (2) To diligently guard the truth, upholding the standard of sound words recorded in Scripture and reflected in our Confession of Faith
- (3) To earnestly seek God's face in prayer both private and corporate for the pleasure of His presence, the needs of the saints, for personal and corporate cleansing from sin and holiness in our journey of sanctification, and for personal and corporate revival as He pleases to give it
- (4) To avoid participation in any secret society which violates the Scriptures or our Confession of Faith
- (5) To wholeheartedly support, love, and care for the church's ministries and members, offering: my prayers, my financial gifts of tithes and offerings, my service
- (6) To boldly witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, living a transformed life and proclaiming the gospel as the Lord guides my steps
- (7) To actively pursue personal holiness before God, loving others as Christ has loved us
- (8) To promote the unity of the church, being a peacemaker with all in the body of Christ
- (9) To respectfully follow the elders and other leaders of this church, trusting and supporting their leadership

- (10) To humbly submit to the church's discipline, graciously repenting when approached about personal sin, and lovingly restoring others who become entangled in sin if they should come to repentance
- (11) To be active in the work of the ministries of the local church, unless providentially hindered
- (12) I also purpose to maintain family and private worship; if God has given me children, to train my children according to the Bible, to walk carefully in the world, to be just in my dealings, faithful in my engagements, and appropriate in my conduct, to avoid gossip, not speaking that which is evil, and to avoid unrighteous anger, to abstain from all forms of activity which dishonor my Lord Jesus Christ, cause stumbling to a fellow believer or hinder bringing a soul to Christ, to be zealous in my efforts to advance the cause of Christ our Savior, and to give Him preeminence in all things.
- (13) I also purpose to guard the biblical structure of the family opposing all forms of abortion and homosexuality.
- (14) I further purpose to encourage my fellow brethren in the blessed hope of our Lord's return, to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feelings and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation.
- (15) I moreover purpose that if I remove from this place, I will seek to as soon as possible to unite with some other church of like faith and practice where I can carry out the spirit of this covenant and other principles of God's Word.

This covenant I make in the presence of Almighty God, the Searcher of all hearts, with a true intention to fulfill my obligations, as I shall answer at the Last Day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed. I most humbly beseech the Lord to strengthen me by His Holy Spirit for this end, and for His glory and honor.

Conclusion: A church covenant is a promise that we make to one another, to God, and to ourselves to reflect the character of God in our lives, and to live out our doctrinal statement.