

1.

The Church Covenant



The Church And Its Covenant

There is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the **Church Covenant** among the membership of the **Lord's churches**. Many give the **Church Covenant** no credence at all, proclaiming that "*the Church Covenant has no claim upon their lives, and that it is merely a man-made document, with no Scriptural basis*" Too many the **Church Covenant** is merely a poster-size print hanging on a church wall. And then there are those who are only marginally aware that a **Church Covenant** exists. Almost all of the Lord's churches have adopted a **Church Covenant**, but few have given it the attentiveness and respect that it should have. As a result of this lack of attentiveness and respect toward the **Church Covenant** many of the **Lord's churches** have a membership that is greatly lacking in spirituality, and many churches have fallen into a state of low credibility with the world!

One of the keys to giving the **Church Covenant** a proper place in the life of the church, and one of the keys to understanding the **Church Covenant** is to understand the nature and the importance of the **Lord's church**. In understanding the nature and importance of the church one begins to grasp the seriousness of membership in one of the Lord's churches and the awesome responsibilities, duties, and obligations that church membership entails. The **Church Covenant** helps to identify and clarify these responsibilities, duties, and obligations! MEMBERSHIP IN ONE OF THE LORD'S CHURCHES IS NOT A SIDE-INTEREST, NOR SHOULD IT EVER BE TREATED AS SUCH!

I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE COVENANT REVEALS THE SERIOUSNESS AND IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERSHIP IN ONE OF THE LORD'S CHURCHES

A. The Nature Of The Church And The Covenant Reveals That Church Membership Is A Privilege, And A Blessing That Involves Great Responsibility And Accountability:

The nature of the church and the covenant makes it quite clear that the church is more than a social organization for the pleasure of its members.

B. The Nature Of The Church And The Covenant Reveals That Each Member Of The Lord's Churches Is To Be An Addition To The Church Of Which They Are A Member:

Each member is to bring about a spiritual increase and improvement to the church. Each member should be an addition to the worship of the church, and to the steadfastness faithfulness,

evangelism, holiness of the church! Each member should be an addition to the spirit and attitude of the church!

C. The Nature Of The Church And The Covenant Reveals That Church Membership Is A Way Of Life:

Church membership is more than having one's name upon a church register, it is personal, it is real, and it is a priority! EVERYTHING THAT A CHURCH OUGHT TO BE ITS MEMBERS OUGHT TO BE!

D. The Nature Of The Church And The Covenant Reveals That Church Membership Is A Commitment:

It is a commitment to the **Lord!** It is a commitment to the **church** of which one is a member! That is, it is a commitment to the purpose and to the work of that church, and a commitment to the individual members of that church! CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP!

E. The Nature Of The Church And The Covenant Reveals That Church Membership Is A Recognition Of Church Authority:

Church membership in one of the *Lord's churches* places one under the authority of the church to which they are a member, AND THIS IS TRUE IN EVERY CASE WITHOUT EXCEPTION! In every case church membership in one of the *Lord's churches* makes one morally bound to abide by the stipulations and conditions of the church of which one is a member. AN INDIVIDUAL JOINS THE CHURCH AND NOT VICE-VERSA! The nature of the *Lord's church* and the *church covenant* reveals that CHURCH MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!

II. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH COVENANT

A. What Is The Church Covenant:

By definition a "*covenant*" is "*a binding agreement made by two or more individuals, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing a specified thing*" Paul states in **Galatians 3:15** that when confirmed a *covenant* is unalterable. A *covenant* is binding [**Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4**]. A *covenant* is illustrative of the contract of marriage [**Malachi 2:14**]. A *covenant* is illustrative of God's promises to man [**Ephesians 2:12**], and of the determination of a people to serve the Lord [**2 Kings 11:17; 2 Chronicles 15:12; Nehemiah 10:29**]. A *covenant* is not something that should be entered into without thought [**Ecclesiastes 5:1-2**]. If one is not in agreement with, or not willing to abide with the terms, the conditions and the stipulations of a *covenant*, then certainly that individual should not enter into such a *covenant!*

1. A Church Covenant Is A Document That States The Understanding Of The Members As To The Nature And Mission Of The Church:

The *church covenant* specifies **the obligations under which the members are placing themselves!** IN NO WAY IS THE CHURCH COVENANT MEANT TO REPLACE THE BIBLE AS A BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER, NOR TO SUPERSEDE IT IN ANY WAY!

2. A Church Covenant Defines Relationships Between Members And God, And Between Members And Members:

3. A Church Covenant Is An Agreement Among Church Members:

It is a summary of how church members agree to live, more importantly IT IS A SUMMARY OF HOW GOD WOULD HAVE US TO LIVE! The *church covenant* does not include every command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a *disciple of Christ!* Just as a *Statement Of Faith* is a summary of what a church believes, so the *Church Covenant* is a summary of how a church agrees to live! A CHURCH COVENANT IS A BIBLICAL STANDARD!

4. A Church Covenant Is An Affirmation Of Commitment:

The *Church Covenant* serves as a focal point for mutual commitment, and it also clarifies what a church is committed to do together!

5. A Church Covenant Is A Solemn Promise:

It represents the word of the membership of a local congregation! A common phrase found throughout the *Church Covenant* are the words “*We engage*” The word “*engage*” means “*to pledge or promise*” Again, **if one is not in agreement or has no intentions of abiding by the stipulations of a covenant, he must not enter into the covenant!**

B. The Spirit And Attitude Of One Entering Into A Covenant:

This is stated in the very first paragraph of the *Church Covenant* by the words “*we do now solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant*” The word “*solemn*” means “*reverent, serious, and awe-inspiring reflection*” The word “*joyfully*” means “*with great pleasure*” ONE SHOULD NEVER ENTER INTO THE CHURCH COVENANT WITHOUT THIS SOLEMNNESS AND JOY!

III. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The **nature** of the church is stated in the first paragraph of the *Church Covenant*:

“Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and, on profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ”

A. The Church Consists Of A Regenerate Church Membership:

1. A Personal Receiving Of Christ Is A Necessity Of Church Membership:

The first part of the **Church Covenant** reads:

“Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour”

HOWEVER SALVATION ALONE DOES NOT MAKE ONE A MEMBER! A **regenerate church membership** is elementary to the Scriptures [**Acts 2:41, 47; Ephesians 2:11-22**]. BAPTISTS HAVE ALWAYS **BELIEVED AND PRACTICED A REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP** AND MUST BEWARE OF ANY PRACTICES THAT WOULD SUBVERT SUCH! The “*walk the aisle*” and the “*repeat after me prayer*” are shallow and deceitful tactics that cheapen and subvert salvation itself and consequently fill churches with the unsaved!

(a). *A Regenerate Church Membership Is Made Up Of Those Who Have Had A Personal Life-Changing Experience With Christ.*

(b). *A Regenerate Church Membership Is Made Up Of Those Who Have Been Transformed Both Inwardly And Outwardly By The Grace Of God.*

(c). *A Regenerate Church Membership Is Made Up Of Those Who Have Personally Experienced The Drawing Power Of God.*

(d). *A Regenerate Church Membership Is Made Up Of Those Who Have The Spirit Of God Dwelling In Them.*

2. A Public Profession Of Saving Faith Is A Necessity Of Church Membership:

The **Church Covenant** states ***“on profession of our faith”*** and the Bible teaches confession with the mouth [**Romans 10:10**]. ALL CANDIDATES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP MUST BE ABLE TO VERBALIZE THEIR SALVATION EXPERIENCE AND THIS MUST BE WITHOUT THE PROMPTING OF ANOTHER PARTY! The receiving of members into the **Lord’s churches must begin with a profession of the saving grace of God!** THE TRULY REGENERATE HAS A STORY TO TELL AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS MADE UP OF PEOPLE WITH A STORY TO TELL!

B. The Church Consists Of A Regenerate And Baptized Church Membership:

The Scriptures very plainly teach that **salvation** is a prerequisite to **baptism** [**Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 36-37; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:30-34**], and that **no one should be baptized without evidence that salvation has taken place** [**Matthew 3:1-8**]. THE CHURCH HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE OF ONE’S PROFESSION OF SALVATION BEFORE ADMINISTRATING BAPTISM! **The church should never baptize anyone who does not show forth evidence of a salvation experience!** Once one has been saved by the grace of God, he or she is to make profession (*confession*) of such and then follow the Lord in **scriptural baptism!** The **Lord** gave His church the authority to baptize [**Matthew 28:16-20**], and the **Lord** adds to His churches [**I Corinthians 12:18**], and He does this by **leading the saved individual**

to follow Him in scriptural baptism [I Corinthians 12:13], and thus, becoming a member of one of His churches [Acts 2:41]. Church membership is made up of those who have given genuine evidence by their life that they are truly saved!

1. A Saved Person Must Have Scriptural Baptism In Order To Be A Member Of One Of The Lord's Churches:

In order for **baptism** to be **scriptural** there must be:

(a). A Proper Candidate (a saved individual).

(b). A Proper Mode (immersion).

(c). A Proper Motive (a matter of obedience, and a public confession of salvation).

(d). A Proper Administrator (a New Testament Baptist Church).

2. Baptism Is A Picture Of The Salvation The Sinner Has Received:

Baptism sets forth the death, burial, and resurrection of **Christ** and the saved individual's participation therein. In baptism the saved individual confesses that they have **died with Christ**, passed through the judgment with Him on the cross, paid the penalty in His death, buried with Him in His grave, and have representatively risen in Him!

3. Baptism Is A Promise To Walk In Newness Of Life [Romans 6:3-4].

4. Baptism Is An Identifying Mark:

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS MADE UP OF THOSE WHO HAVE OPENLY AND UNASHAMEDLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES! They have identified themselves with the **Person** of **Jesus Christ!** They have identified themselves with the **People** of the Lord's kind of church! They have identified themselves with the **Purpose** of the Lord's churches which is to obey the commission and to bring glory to **Christ** through His church! CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS MADE UP OF AN IDENTIFIED PEOPLE!

C. A Regenerate And Baptized Church Membership Is A Quality Church Membership:

Lord-added members to the Lord's churches are referred to as "**members in particular**" [I **Corinthians 12:27**]. The word "**particular**" means "**special and separate**" and has reference to **quality!** Churches that put emphasis upon **quantity** rather than **quality** make a grave error, and endanger **the church of the Lord Jesus Christ!** A **regenerated church membership** speaks of a **quality** and **particular** membership! A **scripturally baptized church membership** speaks of a **quality** and **particular** membership! The **Lord** has established His churches in such a way, and has established a particular order in His churches to safeguard and protect the **quality** and **particularity** of its membership! The **ministry** of the church, the **discipline** of the church, the **ordinances** of the church, the receiving of members by **church letter** are all designed to safeguard and protect the **quality** and **particularity** of the **Lord's churches!** The **quality** and

particularity of the *Lord's churches* is seen from the fact that it is referred to as an "*inclosed garden*" [**Song of Solomon 4:12**].

D. The Church Is A Body Of Christ:

The last part of the first paragraph of the *Church Covenant* states "**one body in Christ**" The kind of church that *Jesus* established during His earthly ministry is often referred to as a "*body of Christ*" [**Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 10:16-17; Ephesians 4:12, 16; Colossians 1:18; 2:19**]. A "*body*" must have a **location!** A "*body*" implies an "*organization, a framework, a systematic grouping of parts into a functional entity*" *Jesus Christ* had a human body **prepared** for Him. We read in **Hebrews 10:5** "*Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared for Me*" Just like *Christ's* fleshly body, each *church of the Lord Jesus Christ* is a **prepared** body [**I Corinthians 12:18, 28**]. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS ALL ABOUT BEING **ADDED** AND **SET** BY THE LORD! It is not about your plans and your devisings. It is not about where you want to retire to It is not about who you and I think would make good church members It is not about where the work is, or where the money is, or where the opportunity is, it is not about job transfers. It is not about climate, or family. *Christ* in His fleshly body has passed into the heavens, no longer visible to the eye, BUT his CHURCHES ARE NOW HIS REPRESENTATIVE BODY IN THE WORLD! Therefore the *Church Covenant* which is a **summary** of how *God* would have us to live, and an **affirmation of commitment to God, to His church, to personal holiness, and to one another** is of vital importance!

E. The Church And The Analogy Of A Body:

1. People Are Identified By Their Bodies:

Just as we are identified by our fleshly bodies, so *Christ* is identified by His body here on earth!

2. Bodies Are Dwelling Places:

A human body is not the person, **but the place where the person lives and dwells!** Each of the *Lord's churches* are a "*body of Christ*" in a particular place, and as such *Jesus Christ* lives and dwells there! Just as there is a definite connection between a person and their fleshly body, likewise, there is a definite connection between a "*body of Christ*" and *Jesus Christ* Himself!

3. A Body Is By Design:

A "*body*" is **prepared**, a creation by **design!** A "*body*" is not an accident, or thrown together in some haphazard way! A "*body*" has been put together by the Lord in a suitable **order** and for a **purpose!** This is not only true of a human "*body*" it is true of each and every "*church of the Lord Jesus Christ*" God sets the members in place in our human bodies, and God sets the members in place in the *bodies of Christ* [**I Corinthians 12:18**]. The reason that my right arm is in the place that it is, is because God placed it there! A "*body*" is a **miracle** and **wonder** of *God!* David speaking of his own bodily creation said in **Psalms 139:14** "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" JUST AS OUR HUMAN BODIES ARE A CREATION MIRACLE AND WONDER OF GOD LIKEWISE THE LORD'S CHURCHES!

4. *The Analogy Of A Body Speaks Of The Relation Of The Members Of The Body To One Another:*

In **Ephesians 4:16** the words *“every joint”* and *“every part”* is descriptive of the members of the body! In **Ephesians 4:25** Paul wrote *“we are members one of another”* This being true of a *“body of Christ”* then each member has its own special place and work, and cannot be negligent without causing harm to the entire body!

(a). *Each And Every Part Must Be Content With Its Place And Office In The Body [I Corinthians 12:16-20].*

The example of our human bodies reveal that though each member is different each can do extraordinary things in their proper place and office! THE SAME IS TRUE OF THE LORD’S CHURCH AS A BODY OF CHRIST!

(b). *Each And Every Part Must Be In Unison With The Other Parts And Contributing To The Health Of The Body:*

In **Ephesians 4:16** we read *“the whole body fitly (tightly, securely) joined (united, connected, linked) together and compacted (knit together as one) by that which every joint supplieth, according to (in accord with) the effectual (effective) working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* THE REASON THAT EVERY PART OF THE BODY MUST BE TIGHTLY, SECURELY UNITED, CONNECTED, LINKED, AND KNIT TOGETHER IS SO THAT EACH AND EVERY PART CAN FUNCTION PROPERLY IN THE BODY, TO THE GOOD AND BENEFIT OF THE BODY! Paul said in **I Corinthians 12:25** *“there should be no schism (division, separation, disharmony) in the body”*

(c). *Each And Every Part Must Care For The Other Parts:*

This is seen throughout **I Corinthians 12:12-28** and Paul wrote to the churches of **Galatia** in **Galatians 5:15** *“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another”*

5. *The Analogy Of A Body Speaks Of The Relation Of The members Of The Body To The Head:*

The **Lord’s churches**, as the *“bodies of Christ”* have **Jesus Christ** as their head [**Colossians 1:15-18**]. The *“head”* is the highest part of the body, the most exalted, the most honorable part. THE FIRST THING THAT PEOPLE OUGHT TO SEE IS THE HEAD!

(a). *The Head Is Indispensable To Life:*

Separate from the *“head”* the *“body”* is nothing, and can do nothing! **Jesus** said to His first church *“Without Me, ye can do nothing”* NEVER FORGET THESE WORDS! Apart from the *“head”* the church ceases to be! No matter how gifted the members are, apart from the *“head”* all the members of the body die! No member can ever replace the *“head”* No amount of gifts and talent, no amount of money can replace the *“head”*

(b). *The Head Directs:*

The **head** is the telegraph room of the body. In the physical body signals are sent from the **head** to the arms, legs, feet, hands, fingers, etc. THE HEAD CONTROLS THE BODY! **Christ**, the **head** rules His churches, He does this with His **Word** and the **Holy Spirit**. The **church** is to receive its direction from its head!

(c). *The Head Nourishes:*

If communication is stopped between the **head** and the members of the body, that member becomes paralyzed! That member can become useless to the body! That member can become cumbersome to the body! IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH MEMBER OF EACH LOCAL BODY OF CHRIST TO STAY IN COMMUNICATION WITH THE JESUS CHRIST FOR THE SAKE OF THE BODY!

F. The Church Ought To Have A Likeness To The Fleshly Body Of Christ:

1. *The Fleshly Body Of Christ Was Humble And Unattractive In Appearance:*

The **Jews** were looking for the Messiah to appear in the glorious body of a king, and though they saw no beauty in the fleshly body of **Christ**, within that fleshly body of **Christ** dwelt the *“the fullness of the Godhead”* Within that fleshly body of **Christ** dwelt **God** Himself! But unannointed eyes could only see a a fleshly body! Though the churches of the **Lord Jesus Christ** are the habitation of God, the place where God has deposited His truth, and the place where **Jesus Christ** receives glory, the world cannot see it! The *churches of the Lord Jesus Christ* are unattractive to the world, even to the religious world and THE CHURCH IS NEVER TO COMPROMISE WHO THEY ARE IN ORDER TO MAKE THEMSELVES ATTRACTIVE!

2. *The Fleshly Body Of Christ Was A Living And Active Body:*

Jesus Christ lived in a world that knew Him not, in a world that hated Him, in a world that rejected Him, in a world where He was looked upon as strange! His message was hated and counted as strange by the world! His lifestyle was hated and counted as strange by the world! The **Lord’s churches** as *“bodies of Christ”* have been placed in a world that knows not **Jesus Christ**, in a world that hates and rejects Jesus Christ, but just as **Jesus Christ went from city to city doing the work of God**, so His churches are to be constantly doing the work of God! **Jesus** while in His fleshly body said *“I must be about My Father’s business”* and as a *“body of Christ”* the **Lord’s churches must be doing the Father’s business!** EACH AND EVERY MEMBER IS TO BE ACTIVELY SERVING THE LORD!

3. *The Fleshly Body Of Christ Was Filled With The Holy Spirit And Was A Manifestation Of God:*

John the Baptist said of the incarnate **Christ**- *“for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him”* [**John 3:34**]. The church as a *“body of Christ”* is the *“habitation of God through the Spirit”* [**Ephesians 2:20**]. EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY DESPERATELY NEEDS THE FILLING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD!

In light of these things it is easy to see the awesome responsibility, obligation, and privilege of church membership and the immense importance of the *Church Covenant* which is a summary of the terms, conditions, and stipulations of church membership, and how that God would have us to live in order for the *church* to be what it ought to be! The *church* ought to be a **place of worship**, and therefore it is imperative that the members be a people of worship! The *church* ought to be **the pillar and ground of truth**, and therefore it is imperative that the members be a people steadfast in the truth! The *church* ought to be evangelistic, and therefore it is imperative that the members be an evangelistic people! The *church* ought to be holy, and therefore it is imperative that the members be inwardly and outwardly holy! The *church* ought to be loving, and therefore it is imperative that the members be a people of love! The *church* ought to be praying, and therefore it is imperative that the members be a praying people! EVERYTHING THAT THE CHURCH OUGHT TO BE THE MEMBERS MUST BE! The *Church Covenant* is an affirmation of commitment to the *Lord*, to His *church*, and to personal holiness! Such a covenant should never be entered into lightly, or without thought, and without diligent consideration and much prayer!