

## 5.

### *The Church Covenant*



### *The Pledge To Sustain The Church*

In the second paragraph of the *Church Covenant* it is stated that;

***“We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit.....to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines”***

This is an **agreement** and **pledge** on the part of the members of a local ***body of Christ*** to **sustain** that particular body. To ***“sustain”*** is *“strengthen or support, to cause to continue, to carry on, and to uphold”* Some synonyms for the word ***“sustain”*** are *“support, help, assist, encourage, maintain, preserve, perpetuate, and retain”* Each member of a local ***body of Christ*** has a **responsibility**, an **obligation**, and an **accountability** to seek the aid of the ***Holy Spirit*** in order to **sustain** that particular ***body of Christ!***

## I. THE PLEDGE TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP

### **A. What Constitutes Worship:**

One of the primary functions of the ***church*** is worship! When a ***church*** assembles it ought to be to worship, and therefore there must be a proper environment and atmosphere for worship. The highest occupation of the ***child of God***, and the very purpose of their life is to **worship God!** A great deal of confusion exists in modern Christendom as to what constitutes **true worship**. There are more church buildings than ever before, more church services than ever before, but the truth is, there is less worship!

#### **1. Worship Is Declaring The Worth Of God:**

Some things are so **great**, so **magnificent**, so **deep**, so **all-encompassing** that they simply defy definition, and such is true of worship! To most people ***“worship”*** is *“the respectful and formal recognition of God, on certain stated occasions, in accordance with a prepared ritual”* BUT SUCH FALLS FAR SHORT OF REAL AND TRUE WORSHIP! Though ***“worship”*** cannot be adequately defined, there are definitions of value, though none of them fully define what is involved in worship. In order to fully understand what it is to worship, one would need to fully understand God. The English word ***“worship”*** is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word **“worthship”** So to worship God is to **declare His worth [II Samuel 7:18]**, and to **give Him due glory [Psalm 29:2; 96:8]**, and though ***God*** is worthy of such [**Psalm 18:3**], such cannot be fully done! The worship of heaven is an example of **declaring His worth, and giving Him glory [Revelation 4:11; 5:12]**. WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

## 2. *Worship Is Reverence To God:*

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word most often translated as “*worship*” is “*shachah*” meaning “*to bow down, to do homage*” [Exodus 4:31; 12:27; 34:5-9; II Samuel 12:19-20; Job 1:21-22; Psalm 95:6-7]. The principal New Testament word is “*proskuneo*” meaning “*to do reverence, by prostration*” An example of this is seen in Matthew 2:2, 11. The result of **reverence** for **God** is an **exaltation** of **God** [Psalm 145:1-3], and a deep **humility** of heart and mind [Psalm 51:17]. This **humility** is also the result of an inner awareness of our own weakness and unworthiness [II Samuel 7:18]. Most want to feel a personal exaltation in their worship but spiritual worship is a **melting** worship as well as an **elevating** worship! THE MORE THAT WE ELEVATE GOD THE MORE WE MELT AND THE MORE WE MELT THE MORE WE ARE ELEVATED! Worship is **holy** and **sacred!** WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

## 3. *Worship Is To Be For God Alone And Is To Be Unique:*

**Worship** is ALL ABOUT GOD! THE FOCUS OF WORSHIP IS GOD! This is clearly seen in the fragrance prepared for the worship of **God** in *Old Testament* times [Exodus 30:34-38]. Just as that “*fragrance*” was **for God alone**, it rose to **God, unique for Him**, so our worship is to rise up to **God**, and is to be **unique, separated, holy, and well-pleasing** unto Him! THE ONE AND ONLY **OBJECT** OF WORSHIP IS GOD [Psalm 99:5; Daniel 3:28; Matthew 4:10; Revelation 22:8-9]. THE **OBJECT AND MOTIVE** OF WORSHIP IS GOD AND NEVER OURSELVES!

## 4. *Worship Is An Approach And A Drawing Near To God:*

This is clearly seen in David’s worship of God- “*Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord*” [II Samuel 7:18]. David had a very vivid realization of the presence of God! THERE CAN BE NO WORSHIP WITHOUT AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD! The exhortation of Hebrews 10:22 is “*Let us draw near*” IN ALL WORSHIP THERE MUST BE A DRAWING NEAR! ONE CANNOT WORSHIP IF ESTRANGED FROM GOD [Isaiah 1:11-18; Amos 5:21-24]. WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

## 5. *Worship Is Something That We Give To God:*

There is an erroneous idea today that the main reason that people are to attend worship is to “*get something out of the service*” rather than going to the place of worship to **give our worship to God!** But the main emphasis of worship is not about **receiving**, but about **giving** to **God** [I Chronicles 16:29]. “*Worship*” is a **presentation** and **surrender** to **God!** WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

## 6. *Worship Involves Desire For God:*

A desire to **see** the glory of God! A **hunger** and **thirst** for God, a **panting** after God [Psalm 63:1-2]. WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

### 7. *Worship Involves The Heart Of Man:*

“**Worship**” is to be done with a singleness of heart, that is, ALL THOUGHTS MUST BE TAKEN UP WITH THE LORD! It is a carnal worshipper that attempts to give God a piece of his heart! What the *Psalmist* said in **Psalm 119:10** “*With my whole heart have I sought thee*” is illustrative of the heart’s desire in worship! IN ALL TRUE WORSHIP THERE IS A UNITING OF THE HEART WITH GOD! WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

### 8. *Worship Proceeds From A Spiritual Nature And Must Be According To Truth:*

*Jesus*, speaking upon the subject of “**worship**” said in **John 4:23** “*true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit*” He then said in **verse 24** “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit*” THE HEART MUST BE FIRST CAST INTO THE MOLD OF GOD BEFORE IT CAN PERFORM THE WORSHIP REQUIRED BY GOD! It is a worship that is done by the influence and with the assistance of the *Holy Spirit*. John “*was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*” [**Revelation 1:10**]. **Sustaining worship** involves making sure that we are under the influence and assistance of the *Holy Spirit*! Without *Holy Spirit influence* and assistance we cannot act with spiritual motives or for spiritual ends, or in a spiritual manner! Under the influence and assistance of the *Holy Spirit* there is a sensibleness of God’s presence, and a sensibleness of one’s own needs! In order to be under the influence and assistance of the *Holy Spirit* each member must deal with those things in their lives that would “*grieve*” the *Holy Spirit* [**Ephesians 4:30-31**], and must not “*quench*” the *Holy Spirit* [**I Thessalonians 5:19**]. That which would hinder **worship** is to be dealt with [**Matthew 5:23-24**]. The **worship** that the *Holy Spirit* inspires will be **for God alone**, and it will involve a **drawing near to God**, and a deep-seated **desire for God**, and a **united heart with God**! *Jesus* in addition to saying that worship was of a spiritual nature in **John 4:23-24** also said that it must have truth for its basis “*true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit, and in truth.....and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” THE WORSHIP OF THE TRUE GOD CANNOT BE IN A SELF-STYLED MANNER! WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN WORSHIP!

These two things, “spirit” and “truth” are absolutely imperative to true worship. Again, *Jesus* said in **John 4:23** “*true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth*” and then He said “*for the Father seeketh such (they that worship in spirit and truth) to worship Him*” THE ONLY WORSHIP ACCEPTABLE TO GOD MUST BE SPIRITUAL AND ACCORDING TO TRUTH! In other words the only “**worship**” acceptable and pleasing to *God* is that which the *Holy Spirit* inspires! And what the *Holy Spirit* inspires will always be according to God’s pattern! Any other kind of so-called “**worship**” is vain worship, or of no value [**Matthew 15:8-9**], ignorant worship, or uninformed [**Acts 17:22-23**], and will worship, or self-styled [**Colossians 2:23**]. The worship that is pleasing to God has a right object-GOD, a right attitude-SPIRIT, and a right standard-TRUTH!

### **B. Sustaining Of Worship Involves The Assembling Of Ourselves:**

One cannot overestimate the value and the privilege of being in the *Lord’s* house when the doors are open! We ought to enter the *Lord’s* house with a heart filled with praise, with the utmost

**reverence** for the **Lord**, with a spirit of **love** for **God**, for His Word, and for His people! We ought to enter the **Lord's** house with a **desire** to **please God**, with a desire to be **drawn** closer to the **Lord**, with a desire to **exalt** the **Lord** and with a desire to be **taught** of the **Lord!** We ought to enter with **appreciation** and **thankfulness!**

**1. In Order To Sustain Worship We Must Have The Spirit Of The Psalmist:**

In the **84th Psalm** the **Psalmist** reveals his heart's desire for the **Lord's** house.

**(a). The Place Of Worship Was An Amiable Place For Him [verse 1].**

The word "**amiable**" means "*delightful and pleasing*" It was a place where he found great **delight**, and **pleasure!** A place that he found **fascinating**, a place where he found **satisfaction**, a place where he found **gratification**, a place that he saw as **beautiful**, a place that he **relished!** He said in **Psalm 26:8** "*I have loved the habitation of thy house*" and in **Psalm 122:1** "*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord*"

**(b). The Place Of Worship Was An Amiable Place To Him Because It Was The Lord's:**

He referred to it as "*thy tabernacles, O LORD (Jehovah) of hosts*" [verse 1], and as "*the courts of the LORD*" [verse 2], and as "*the house of my God*" [verse 10]. In **Psalm 26:8** he referred to it as "*Thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth*" He referred to it as "*the house of the Lord*" and "*His temple*" [**Psalm 27:4**], and again as "*the house of the Lord*" [**Psalm 122:1**]. HE LOOKED AT THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP AS GOD'S PLACE! It was not an institution or an organization of man IT WAS THE LORD'S! **Jesus** referred to the "**church**" that He came to establish as "*my church*" [**Matthew 16:18**], and in **I Timothy 3:15** it is referred to as "*the house of God which is the church of the living God*"

**(c). The Place Of Worship Was A Place Of Great Blessing And Benefit:**

It was and is a place where a child of God could find **shelter**. The phrases "*Thy tabernacles*" [verse 1], and "*the courts of the Lord*" [verse 2], and "*thine altars*" [verse 3], and "*thy house*" [verse 4], and "*the house of my God*" [verse 10] give a sense of safety for the child of **God!** It was and is a place where a child of God can all **home** [verse 3]. A place of **love**, a place of **instruction!** It was and is a place where joy results in praise [verse 4]. It was a place and is a place where one can **grow**. In **verse 5** we see the individual whose heart is inclined to go to **God's** house, the one who finds satisfaction and delight in **God's** house is blessed of God!

**(d). The House Of God Was Supreme To The Psalmist:**

To him it was the most fulfilling place in the world-"*For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand*" [verse 10]. HE STATES THIS AS A MATTER OF FACT! HE STATES THIS AS A MATTER OF CERTAINTY! HE STATES THIS AS A MATTER OF CONVICTION! He says "*one single day worshipping the Lord in the Lord's house is better than a thousand anywhere else!*" HE DOES NOT SAY THAT IT IS EQUAL TO A THOUSAND HE SAYS IT IS BETTER! BETTER THAN TWO YEARS AND NINE MONTHS ANYWHERE ELSE!

(e). *To Him It Was The Most Desirable Place In The World:*

*"I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" [verse 10].*

**2. In Order To Sustain Worship We Must Realize The Importance Of Assembling For Worship:**

(a). *Assembling For Worship Is Important Because Of Personal Need:*

No matter what your spiritual condition, you need to be in the worship service of the **church**. If you are weak spiritually you need to be there so that you can grow through the preaching of the Word. If you are strong spiritually you need to be there, so that you can grow stronger through the preaching of the Word! If you are unsaved you need to be there, because *"faith cometh by hearing"* The Word of God is *"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* [II Timothy 3:16]. Therefore if a **church** faithfully preaches the Word of God, you need to be there!†

(b). *Assembling For Worship Is Important For Spiritual Maturity:*

For this very purpose the **Lord** has given to His **churches** pastors and teachers [Ephesians 4:11-14].

(c). *Assembling For Worship Is Important For Fellowship With The Saints Of God:*

It is in a **church** of the **Lord Jesus Christ** that the sweetest fellowship this side of heaven can be found [Acts 2:42].

(d). *Assembling For Worship Is Important For Joy In The Lord:*

The **Psalmist** stated in Psalm 16:11 *"in Thy presence is fulness of joy"* And **Jesus** assures us of His presence when His churches meet [Matthew 18:20].

(e). *Assembling For Worship Is Important For A Good Testimony:*

**Jesus** made this clear in His **Sermon On The Mount** [Matthew 5:14-16], and the writer of **Hebrews** also made this clear [Hebrews 10:22-25]. The phrase *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"* [Hebrews 10:25] conveys the idea; that we are not to abandon our responsibilities in the assembling of ourselves together! WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ASSEMBLY AND MANY OF THOSE CANNOT BE CARRIED OUT IF WE FORSAKE THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES! When an individual forsakes the assembly with intent and purpose they break the **Church Covenant** in many ways; They are not *"walking together in Christian love"* They are not *"striving for the advancement of the church"* They are not *"promoting its prosperity or spirituality"* They are not *"sustaining the church"* They are not *"contributing to the church"* They are not *"walking circumspectly"* They are not *"watching over one another in brotherly love"* They are not *"aiding one another"* nor *"cultivating Christian sympathy"* They are not *"carrying out the spirit of the covenant and the principles of God's Word"* From all of this, one can easily see that IT IS A VERY SERIOUS THING TO FORSAKE THE ASSEMBLY!

### 3. In Order To Sustain Worship One Must Not Choose To Forsake The Assembly:

When an individual chooses **willfully** and with **intent** and **purpose** to forsake the assembling of themselves, they commit a multitude of sins. And this **willful** choosing to forsake the assembly becomes a habit, a **sinful habit**. Notice the phrase *“as the manner of some is”* [**Hebrews 10:25**].

(a). *Choosing Not To Assemble Demonstrates A Thinking Lightly Upon Spiritual Things.*

(b). *Choosing Not To Assemble Involves A Choosing Not To Do That Which Is Known To Be Right.*

(c). *Choosing Not To Assemble Involves A Choosing Not To Give Or Receive Needed Encouragement.*

(d). *Choosing Not To Assemble Is A Violation Of An Explicit Command.*

(e). *Choosing Not To Assemble Contributes To Spiritual Ignorance.*

(f). *Choosing Not To Assemble Sets A Bad Example.*

(g). *Choosing Not To Assemble Discourages Others.*

(h). *Choosing Not To Assemble Demonstrates That One’s Priorities Are Not Properly Arranged.*

(i). *Choosing Not To Assemble Is One Of Those Things That If Everyone Else Chose To Do So There Would Be No Church.*

## II. THE PLEDGE TO SUSTAIN CHURCH PRACTICES

In addition to the pledge to *“sustain”* the **worship** of the *Lord’s church* there is the pledge to *“sustain its **ordinances, discipline, and doctrines”***

These three things are essential to **decency** and **order** in the *Lord’s churches* [**I Corinthians 14:40**].

### A. The Ordinances Of The Church:

An **“ordinance”** by definition is *“that which is ordered or commanded”* In spiritual usage it has reference to *“Divinely instituted practices relating to the worship of God showing forth truth through its symbolism”* A **“church ordinance”** is *“an appointment of Christ left to His churches”* The word **“ordinance”** is used to describe the two institutions of **baptism** and the **Lord’s Supper**. Paul instructed the *Corinthian church* *“Keep (retain, hold on to, continue in, guard) the ordinances as I delivered them unto you”* [**I Corinthians 11:2b**]. **Christ** left the *New Testament Church, (the kind of church that He organized during His earthly ministry)* these two **“ordinances”** of **baptism**, and the **Lord’s Supper** to be observed until He returns [**Matthew 28:18-20; I Corinthians 11:26**]. These **“ordinances”** are left to the **churches** of the **Lord**, and not to individual children of God, or to the organizations of men, **to be practiced in accord with**

**the pattern that the Lord has left!** When the *Lord* issues a command, He also gives **specific** instruction as to the way He wants it carried out! IT IS NO DIFFERENT WITH THE ORDINANCES OF BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER! To deviate from the *Lord's pattern* for **baptism** and the **Lord's Supper** is to turn them into mere rituals, and to corrupt them as to their purpose! Each and every member of a local "*body of Christ*" has the responsibility to "**sustain**" to "*strengthen or support, to cause to continue, to carry on, and to uphold*" the "**ordinances**" of **baptism**, and the **Lord's Supper!** WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN THE ORDINANCES!

## **B. The Discipline Of The Church:**

"**Discipline**" is absolutely essential to **decency** and **order!** "**Discipline**" covers a wide range and is varied in its different aspects! "**Discipline**" is "*teaching, instruction, and tutoring*" It is "*to train by instruction or exercise*" It is "*training that molds, strengthens, corrects, or perfects*" It is "*training to obedience*" It is "*the training to act in accordance with established rules*" "**Discipline**" in its full sense means **teaching, training, correction, and cultivation!** This "**discipline**" is stressed in the **commission** that the *Lord* left His *churches*- "*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" [Matthew 28:20]. This "**discipline**" falls into three categories:

### **1. Formative Discipline:**

This begins immediately upon one's reception into the fellowship of one of the *Lord's* churches, and has reference to the **training** and **development** of the members in accordance with Scriptural principles and precepts. It is the diligent **instruction** of members! Both the *church* collectively, and the individual member has a responsibility concerning this "**discipline**" The *church's* responsibility is to provide **teaching**, and **guidance** to its members, and the individual member is responsible to **receive** what is provided, and make **application** to their life, and to **obey!** IN THIS WAY CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS SUSTAINED! WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN CHURCH DISCIPLINE!

### **2. Corrective Discipline:**

This involves **admonishment**, and **reproof** [II Timothy 3:16-4:2], and is to be **humbly** and **graciously** received by each member, and by so-doing church "**discipline**" is sustained! WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN CHURCH DISCIPLINE!

### **3. Excisive Discipline:**

This involves the **exclusion** of a member for some offense or for a persistent course of sin. This is "*severe corrective discipline*" and is the most severe action that a *church* can take to correct a sin problem [Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5]. The purpose of this aspect of "**discipline**" as in all aspects of "**discipline**" is for the good of the individual, and also for the good of the church! This aspect of church "**discipline**" is sustained by supporting such an action when necessary!

## **C. The Doctrine Of The Church:**

The term “*doctrine*” has reference to “*the established teachings of the Lord*” This “*doctrine*” is the foundation of the teaching and training that the *Lord’s churches* are responsible for, and must be sustained by each individual member! Establishment in “*doctrine*” is very needful [I Timothy 4:12-13, 16; II Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9]. THIS IS NECESSARY FOR THE SUSTAINING OF DOCTRINE! “*Doctrine*” is also sustained by living a life correspondent and in accord with the teachings of the Lord [Romans 6:17; Titus 1:1; Titus 2:10]. The “*doctrine*” which the *Lord* left His *church* is sustained by taking advantage of every opportunity to grow in such! It is sustained by firm belief and persuasion of such, and it is sustained by proclamation, and by living a life of holiness! WE COVENANT TO SUSTAIN DOCTRINE!

Each and every member pledges, and is responsible and accountable to “*strengthen to support, to cause to continue, to carry on, to uphold, to support, help, assist, encourage, maintain, preserve, perpetuate, and retain*” the worship of the *church,* the ordinances, the discipline, and the doctrine of the *church!* THIS INSURES THAT THINGS ARE IN ORDER, AND THAT THE CHURCH IS HEALTHY!