

7.

The Church Covenant



The Pledge To A Spiritual Home Life

The third paragraph of the **Church Covenant** begins;

“We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children”

This portion of the **Covenant** deals with each church member’s behavior in both their **private** and **family** life. The **church** cannot be what it ought to **be**, and cannot fully **do** what it ought to do if the homes of its members are not what they ought to be! SPIRITUALLY STRONG CHURCHES REQUIRE SPIRITUALLY STRONG HOMES! Also the **church** cannot be what it ought to be, and cannot fully do what it ought to do if the members do not take the time and effort to be more spiritual in their individual lives! SPIRITUALLY STRONG CHURCHES REQUIRE SPIRITUALLY STRONG MEMBERS!

This part of the **Church Covenant** is a pledge to **maintain** the spirituality of the **home** and the **individual** life. To **“maintain”** something is *“to continue, to preserve, to keep, to sustain, to take good care of, to look after, to nurture, and feed”* WE PLEDGE TO MAINTAIN SPIRITUALITY IN OUR HOMES AND IN OUR LIVES! This part of the **Church Covenant** is a pledge to maintain **devotion** in both the **home** and the **individual** life. The word **“devotion”** means *“an act of dedication, or to set apart to a sacred work”* Spiritual and God-fearing men, who held the work of **God** in high esteem are referred to as **“devout”** men [**Luke 2:25; Acts 2:5; 8:2; 10:1-2**]. WE PLEDGE TO MAINTAIN SPIRITUAL DEDICATION IN BOTH OUR HOMES AND INDIVIDUAL LIVES!

I. THE PLEDGE TO MAINTAIN FAMILY AND SECRET DEVOTION

A. The Maintaining Of Family Devotion:

As already stated, *“worship is one of the primary functions of a church”* and it is of the utmost importance that we realize that **the worship of the church and the spiritual condition of the home and the individual life cannot be separated!** There is a very definite connection between the **service** of the **church** and the **spirituality** of the home. In **II Samuel 6:18-20** it is recorded that after the people worshipped in the **Tabernacle** that they *“departed every one to his house”* [verse 19], and that after **David** *“blessed the people in the name of the Lord”* [verse 18] that he *“returned to bless his household”* [verse 20]. THERE WAS A CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD’S PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE DOMESTIC!

1. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves An Attitude And Determination:

This is set forth by Joshua. In a time of great and widespread national weakness, and in the midst of a people strongly bent toward idolatry, Joshua declared openly his determination [**Joshua 24:15**]. This attitude and determination is also seen in **Job** who continually prayed for his family [**Job 1:5**].

2. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves The Word Of God Having A Central Part:

The Word of God must be the **rule** book, and the **philosophy** of the home [**Deuteronomy 6:5-9; 11:18-21**]. From this it is clearly seen that the course of family conversation, and the theme of family instruction was *“the law of the Lord”* The Word of God was to be **central** in the home, it was to occupy a place of **priority** at the **hearth**, at the **door**, at the **gate**, and as father and son walked in the way, *“the law of the Lord”* held a place of **prominence**. The pledge to *“maintain family devotion”* is a pledge to do all that one can to make sure that their home is **built** upon, **filled** with, and **surrounded** by the Word of God!

3. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves Submission To The Lord:

The **Lord** must be given His proper place if the home is to be right. Whatever the home situation may be, the members of the **Lord’s churches** are to strive to be **surrendered** to the **Lord** in their home life.

(a). In The Case Of An Unsaved Or Backslidden Spouse:

The **church** member pledges to **submit** to the **Lord** and **be** what **God** would have them to be in their home situation [**I Peter 3:1-4**]. If children have unsaved parents, they are to **submit** to the **Lord** and **be** what **God** would have them to be in their home situation [**Ephesians 6:1-3**].

(b). In The Case When Both Husband And Wife Are Saved:

They are to be **submitted** to the Lord, that they can **be** *“heirs together of the grace of life”* [**I Peter 3:7**].

4. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves The Following The Example Of Christ:

Jesus Christ is the **pattern** by which each one in the home are to work by. He is the **way** that each in the home is to walk in. To *“maintain family devotion”* one must strive to follow **Christ’s** example of **service** [**Luke 22:27**]. **Jesus Christ** was not ashamed of being counted as inferior. There must be a following of **Christ’s** example of **suffering wrong** [**I Peter 2:19-20**]. There must be a following of **Christ’s** example of **self-denial** [**Romans 15:1-3**]. There must be a following of **Christ’s** example of **doing God’s will** [**I John 6:38**]. There must be a following of **Christ’s** example of His **love** [**John 13:34; 15:12**]. Such *“love”* seeks not it’s own, but gives itself entirely! There must be a following of **Christ’s** example of **forgiveness** [**Colossians 3:13**]. To *“forgive”* as **Christ** must become a ruling principle of the conduct of the members of a home.

5. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves Being Spirit Filled:

In order for the home to be solid, those living in the home should be living in accordance with *“Thus saith the Lord”* and the **power** to live such a life is the filling of the **Holy Spirit**. Paul

wrote in **Ephesians 5:18** “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*” and he then proceeds to speak of family relationships [**Ephesians 5:21-6:4**]. FAMILIES COULD BE WHAT THEY OUGHT TO BE IF THEY WERE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD! If a husband is under the influence and control of the *Holy Spirit*, then he will be the husband and father he ought to be. Wives will be the wives and mothers they ought to be when yielded to, and under the influence and control of the *Holy Spirit*! If those in the home are Spirit-filled, then they will be Spirit-led, and they will be in their proper places, fulfilling their *God-given* roles, to the honor and glory of *God*!

6. The Pledge For Family Devotion Involves Being Faithful To The House Of God:

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOME NEED TO BE SUBORDINATE TO THE LORD’S CHURCH! Marriages and homes built upon Godly principles will be faithful in attendance to the *Lord’s* house, faithful to the finances of the *Lord’s* house, faithful to the ministry of the *Lord’s* house, and faithful to all facets of the *Lord’s* house.

7. The Pledge For Family Devotion Includes The Spirit Of Prayer:

A family devoted is a heavenly home, and a heavenly home will be the abode of Spirit-filled, and Spirit-led prayer, where God is acknowledged in all things! THIS IS A PLEDGE FOR THE FAMILY TO PRAY AND STUDY GOD’S WORD TOGETHER!

8. The Pledge For Family Devotion Includes Strong And Meaningful Relationships:

Husband and wife will take pleasure in each other, and will delight in the love and company of each other [**Proverbs 5:18-19**]. In a marriage and home built upon Godly principles, both husband and wife will keep their love for one another, growing closer to the Lord, and closer to one another. Husband and wife will carefully care and help each other. Both will help each other spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Husband and wife will be careful to guard the honor of each other, and the reputation of each other will be as dear as their own. The husband is to love his wife and the wife is to love her husband! This mutual love between husband and wife is a love that shows itself in appreciation, in caring, in provision, in sharing, in esteem, in help, in consideration, in co-operation, in commitment, in communication, and in pleasing one another! It is a love that delights in the company of one another! Marriage should be, and can be the most meaningful of all human relationships, and the most joyful and beneficial! IF THERE IS NOT A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE, THEN THE CHURCH OF WHICH THEY ARE A MEMBER IS HINDERED TO SOME DEGREE!

B. The Maintaining Of Secret Devotion:

The *Church Covenant* reads

“We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions”

Again, to “*maintain*” something is “*to continue, to preserve, to keep, to sustain, to take good care of, to look after, to nurture, and feed*” One of the things that each *church* member pledges to maintain is “*secret (private and individual) devotion*” Again, “*devotion*” is “*an act of dedication, or to set apart to a sacred work*” To “*maintain secret devotion*” is “*to keep oneself in a serviceable condition to the Lord*” It is “*to keep ourselves spiritually strong and healthy*”

1. Negatively This Is A Pledge To Keep Oneself From A State Of Spiritual Decline:

In **Hebrews 2:1** **spiritual decline** is referred to by the phrase *“let them slip”* and in **II Peter 3:17** by the phrases *“being led away”* and *“fall from your own steadfastness”* SPIRITUAL DECLINE IS REAL! To allow spiritual things to *“slip”* is *“to allow them to slide, to deteriorate, degenerate, worsen, and elapse”* To be *“led away”* is *“to go aside, to grow distant, or to go elsewhere”* To *“fall”* spiritually is *“to descend, to go down, to tumble, to subside, to decrease, to decline, to diminish, and to fade”* SPIRITUAL DECLINE IS REAL and is referred to by the term *“backsliding”* The word *“backsliding”* conveys the idea of *“losing ground spiritually, sliding backwards spiritually”* THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE IS REAL! We read in **Hebrews 2:1** *“lest at any time we let them slip”* The words *“at any time”* reveal the ever-present danger and possibility of spiritual decline! The pledge to *“maintain secret devotion”* IS A PLEDGE TO AVOID SPIRITUAL DECLINE!

2. Positively This Is A Pledge To Keep Oneself In A State Of Spiritual Growth:

In **II Peter 3:18** the child of **God** is told to *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* The pledge to *“maintain secret devotion”* is a pledge *“to increase in spiritual degree, strength, and vigor”* It is a pledge *“to advance spiritually, to make spiritual progress, to abound spiritually, to become stronger spiritually, and more spiritually mature”* THIS IS INCLUSIVE OF EVERY ASPECT OF ONE’S SPIRITUAL LIFE!

3. The Means Of Maintaining Secret Devotion:

The pledge to *“maintain secret devotion”* is a pledge to do that which will lead to **spiritual growth** and to make use of all the means that God provides for individual **spiritual growth**.

(a). If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion They Must Realize At All Times That Nothing Is As Important As The Soul:

As important as physical and mental health are, the soul is eternal! The world and all that it contains shall pass away! The pleasures of this life and all the things of this world—your soul shall outlive them all! YOUR SOUL IS THE PART OF YOU WHICH OUGHT ALWAYS TO BE FIRST CONSIDERED! No place, no employment is good for you which injures your soul! No friend, no companion is good for you that injures your soul! Keep in view morning, noon, and night the interests of your soul! RISE UP EACH DAY WITH THE DESIRE THAT THE SOUL MIGHT PROSPER! The pledge to *“maintain secret devotion”* IS A PLEDGE TO ALWAYS CONSIDER THE SOUL!

(b). If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion They Must Be Careful Of The Atmosphere In Which They Live:

They must **flee** from sin, and **shun** everything that would prove an occasion to sin, **keep** a distance from sin, and always remember that *“evil communications corrupt good manners”* [**I Corinthians 15:33**]. They must BEWARE OF THAT WHICH SOWS THE SEEDS OF AN EARTHLY AND SENSUAL FRAME OF MIND, AND OF THAT WHICH DIMS SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION! There must be a **looking within**, an **examining of the heart**, and a constant

going to the Lord for **cleansing**. The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO BE CAREFUL!

(c). *If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion They Must Stay Near To God:*

We read in **Job 22:21** “*Acquaint thyself with God*” KEEP NEAR TO GOD! **Cleave** to Him! **Lean** upon Him! **Sit** at His feet! **Follow** Him! DO NOT ALLOW ANYTHING TO COME BETWEEN YOU AND THE LORD! What the *Psalmist* said in **Psalm 73:28** is true of all, under all circumstances, and in every place. He said “*It is good for me to draw near to God*” This is so, because of **who He is!** This is so because it **promotes holiness, it helps the understanding, it fixes the heart upon God! It prevents the heart from becoming hard! It prevents the heart from becoming bitter! It prevents the heart from becoming impenitent! And it keeps the heart willing! It keeps the heart soft and pure! It keeps the heart tender! It keeps the heart meek!** This is so because it will **fortify the mind in the hour of temptation, and revive spiritual desires!!** This is so, because such will **prevent much spiritual peril, and turmoil, and will guard from spiritual loss!** The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO STAY NEAR TO GOD!

(d). *If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion They Must Maintain Resistance:*

NEVER GIVE UP THE SPIRITUAL GROUND YOU HAVE GAINED! Do not allow **obstacles, people, things, or circumstances** to have a place of control! The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO HOLD WHAT ONE HAS GAINED SPIRITUALLY!

(e). *If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion They Must Give The Word Of God A Daily Place Of Priority [Deuteronomy 17:18-20; Joshua 1:8; Acts 17:11].*

The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO BE IN THE WORD OF GOD DAILY!

(f). *If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion Then Prayer Must Be A Daily Priority [Psalm 55:17-18; 116:1-2].*

Jesus left an example of such [**Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12**]. **Jesus** instructed in **Matthew 6:6** “*When thou prayest, enter into thy closet*” These words suggest not only a **silent** and **secluded** place, but also a **stated** place. When David received tidings of the death of Absalom, he went up to the chamber over the gate [**II Samuel 18:33**] , as though that was the spot where he was accustomed to go to pray. When the widow of Zarephath informed Elijah of the death of her son, Elijah carried him up into a loft, and then and there he cried unto the Lord [**I Kings 17:19-20**]. It seems that in both of these cases there was a stated place of prayer. The same is also true of **Christ** [**Luke 22:39-42**]. The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO DAILY PRAYING!

(g). *If One Is To Maintain Secret Devotion Then Regular Church Attendance Must Be A Priority:*

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:11-15** that the Lord gave “**pastors**” and “**teachers**” to His churches for the purpose of establishing spiritual maturity. The pledge to “**maintain secret devotion**” IS A PLEDGE TO BE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD AT THE STATED TIMES FOR SUCH!

To “*maintain family and secret devotion*” is the responsibility and pledge of each member of one of the *Lord’s churches*. In so doing the *church* of which one is a member is strengthened, encouraged, and made to prosper! The health of a *church* coincides with the spiritual health of each member, and each home. Therefore it is imperative that each one strive to “*maintain family and secret devotion*”

II. THE PLEDGE TO RELIGIOUSLY EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN

The *Church Covenant* reads that:

“We engage.....to religiously educate our children”

In addition to keeping oneself in a serviceable condition to the *Lord* and spiritually strong and healthy, there is a pledge to spiritually educate (train, and teach) our children. In other words, EVERY MEMBER PLEDGES TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN IN THE NURTURE AND ADMONITION OF THE LORD! THIS IS A PLEDGE TO GODLY UPBRINGING! This is no easy task, considering that we live in a society that has become almost entirely dependent upon the opinions and ideas of the so-called “*experts*” who for the most part are bent on eroding Biblical values in our everyday lives. Our society has come to respect the opinions of sinful, godless individuals over the clear teaching of God’s Word. BUT THIS IS A PLEDGE TO RAISE OUR CHILDREN ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF GOD’S WORD! The pledge to spiritually educate our children is of extreme importance to the well-being of society, and to the well-being of the Lord’s churches. This is what the *Psalmist* is speaking of in **Psalm 145:4**, and is what Paul was referring to in **II Timothy 1:5**.

A. To Spiritually Educate Our Children We Must Have A Proper Perception Concerning Them:

We are to look at our children as Jacob did [**Genesis 33:5**], and as Joseph did [**Genesis 48:9**], and as the *Psalmist* did [**Psalm 127:3-5**]. God gives children to dad’s and mom’s to teach, to provide for, to nurture, to control, and to love! PARENTS ARE THE GUARDIANS AND CUSTODIANS OF THEIR CHILDREN! In our hands are deposited the hope and blessing or else the curse and plague of the next generation. Families are the school for both church and state. *Israel* had been commanded of God to take the time and effort to teach their children [**Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6-7; 11:19; 31:11-13**]. THIS IS THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS! *Israel* failed in this responsibility [**Judges 2:10**].

B. This Is A Pledge To Train, And To Bring Up Our Children In The Nurture And Admonition Of The Lord:

Solomon wrote in his wisdom “*Train up a child in the way that he should go*” [**Proverbs 22:6**], and Paul wrote “*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” [**Ephesians 6:4**]. THIS REQUIRES TIME, ATTENTION, EFFORT, CONSISTENCY, RULES, AND LOVE! Solomon used the word “*train*” and it means “*to form by instruction, discipline, or drill, to teach as to make fit, to make prepared, to direct*” The command is “*Train up a child in the way he*

should go” NOT IN THE WAY THEY WOULD GO! Two ways lie before them; the way in which they will go if left to themselves and the way in which they should go. Paul used the word “bring” he said “*bring them up*” meaning “to make move in a particular direction, or to cause something to happen” The very word conveys the idea of **control!** Paul goes on to explain how this is to be carried out “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” The word “nurture” is a general term and includes everything that we **do** for children. It is our **actions** in developing the **mind**, and the **spirit**, the **morals**, the **behavior**, and whole **personality** of the child. The word “admonition” puts the emphasis upon **speech**, it is what we say in cultivating the character of the child. This would include words of **exhortation**, words of **encouragement**, words of **reproof**, and words of **blame**. The most important phrase of all in Paul’s instruction is “*in the Lord*” This is where Christian parents in their duty towards their children, are in an entirely different category from all other parents. This is more than general morality, or good manners or commendable behavior, all of that is included but this is more! Children are to be trained to show **respect**, and to **treat others properly**, to show **courtesy** and **helpfulness**, to **care for property**, to **show good manners**, to **be a good citizen**, to **behave**, to be **proper in behavior**, to **work**, and to **do their best**, but the phrase “*in the Lord*” goes beyond all of this, and stresses **spirituality!**

C. How This Training Is To Be Carried Out:

1. The Child Must Be Trained With Love And Patience:

Love should run through all aspects of child training! There must be **kindness**, **long-suffering**, **forbearance**, **consistency**, and **correction!**

2. The Child Must Be Trained With The Realization That The Soul Of The Child Is The Most Important:

To pamper and indulge the child, as if the world was all they had to look to is a great mistake and miscalculation.

3. The Child Must Be Trained Remembering Continually The Influence Of The Parent’s Example:

4. The Child Must Be Trained Remembering How The Lord Trains His Children:

5. The Child Must Be Trained Using Corrective Discipline:

Solomon spoke of this in his wisdom [**Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17**]. The child must be made to see the connection between acts and consequences!

This part of the **Church Covenant** is a pledge to keep ourselves in such a spiritual condition that we contribute to the spiritual well-being of our homes, which in turn, contributes to the spiritual well-being of the church of which we are a member! THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE HOME AND THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE CHURCH!