

# The Church Covenant

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# The Church Covenant

Is it right for a Christian to make a vow or a covenant? Does the Bible recommend for believers to make such promises? Once a vow or covenant is made, can anything break that vow? This is the idea behind “The Church Covenant”. We will look at the Church Covenant and the vow that a Christian makes when he accepts it.

First, we must understand what a vow and a covenant is. A vow is a voluntary promise made by an individual and is not to be broken (Numbers 30:2- *“If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.”*, Deuteronomy 23:21-22- *“When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.”*, Ecclesiastes 5:4-5- *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”*). Noah Webster, in his 1828 dictionary, defines “vow” as, “A solemn promise made to God...A vow is a promise of something to be given or done hereafter.” Then, he defines “covenant” as, “A mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing; a contract; stipulation.” Vows cover a multitude of subjects and apply to many areas of life. Several Biblical characters made vows (Genesis 28:18-22, Numbers 21:2, Judges 11:30). The conditions to a vow and its operation are found in Numbers 30.

Some Christians may shun or mock at the idea of making a vow. However, it is important that a believer commit his life to a certain purpose or Scriptural doctrine. It is eminent that saints of God dedicate their life to following and practicing the Word of God. There must be a point in a Christian’s life that he or she determines and makes up their mind that they will do right no matter what comes their way. First, the believer must determine that if the vow is right, and once that is settled, they should commit to keeping it.

This was the aim and goal behind the Church Covenant. It was completed and adopted by a group of Baptist in New Hampshire in the year 1834. The design of it was to bring Baptist believers to a common ground that they can agree on and follow. Certainly, it is not an exhaustive statement of what they believe, but is used as a Scriptural guideline for Christian character and conduct.

Dr. Eugene Goodman offers a suggested history of the writing of the Church Covenant.

“The movement toward writing a church covenant for Baptist Churches began on June 24, 1830 at the session of the New Hampshire Baptist State Convention. A committee of three was selected to prepare a systematic statement of Baptist doctrines to be issued under the title ‘A Declaration of Faith’. Their draft of the doctrinal statement was approved in 1831. The committee was dismissed and Brother I. Pearson was left in charge to complete the work. He reported back in 1834. His report was approved; the doctrinal statement was placed under the study of a committee of four men who made some slight alterations in wording. It was completed in October, 1834 and sent out to the churches as a recommended statement of Baptist faith.

The church covenant was written by Dr. J. Newton Brown as an appendage to that ‘New Hampshire Declaration of Faith’. The covenant was intended to be the practical application of what Baptists believe and how Baptists behave. It sets out how Baptists must live to be consistent with the doctrine they profess to believe.”

Certainly, the Church Covenant was not intended to be a creed for all Baptist churches to follow. It is simply a suggestion for all believers to practice. It should be used as a standard of faith and practice. The following is the covenant that Dr. J. Newton Brown published in the “New Hampshire Confession of Faith”.

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

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word."

The Following is a revision of the covenant and an explanation of the meaning of it. Scripture references are provided and should be looked up in order to follow the covenant.

"Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God (John 6:63; 16:7-11, 14), to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:13), and on profession of our faith (Acts 2:41; 8:37), having been baptized in the name of our Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19), we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Acts 2:42).

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13), to walk together in Christian love (Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Thess. 4:9); to strive for the advancement of this church (Eph. 2:21-23) in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), holiness (2 Cor. 7:1) and comfort (1 Thess. 5:14); to promote its prosperity and spirituality (Jude 1:20); to sustain its worship (Heb. 10:25), ordinances (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-34), discipline (Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5) and doctrines (Acts 2:42; 2 John 1:9-11); to give it a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin (Acts 5:26-29); and to contribute cheerfully and regularly (1 Cor. 16:2) to the support of the ministry (Matt. 10:10; Gal. 6:6), the expenses of the church (Malachi 3:8-10), the relief of the poor (Acts 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:1-5), and the spread of the Gospel through all nations (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8).

We also engage to maintain family (Deut. 6:1-12; 11:18-20) and private devotions (Matt. 6:6); to religiously educate our children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:1-12); to seek the salvation of our kindred, acquaintances (Mark 5:19; Luke 5:19), and all others; to walk circumspectly in the world (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:15); to be just in our dealings (Rom. 12:17), faithful to our engagements (Eph. 4:25), and exemplary in our deportment (Eph. 5:8); to avoid all tattling (Eph. 4:31; 1 Tim. 5:13), backbiting (2 Cor. 12:20), and excessive anger (Eph. 4:26, 31); to abstain from worldly amusements such as movie attendance, gambling, rock music, and dancing; to be free from all oath-bound secret societies and partnerships with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14); to abstain from the sale (Habakkuk 2:15) or use of

tobacco in any form, narcotic drugs, or intoxicating drink as a beverage (1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5); and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of our Saviour (Acts 1:8; 8:4).

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10); to remember each other in prayer (Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:25); to aid each other in sickness and distress (Gal. 6:10); to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling (1 Cor. 12:25-26) and courtesy of speech (Titus 3:2; Col. 4:6); to be slow to take offense (Rom. 12:19), but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour, and to secure reconciliation without delay (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-18).

We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church of like faith where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word (Acts 18:27-28; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:23)."

**"Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God (John 6:63; 16:7-11, 14), to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:13)..."**

In the opening statements of the Church Covenant, we see the intent and purpose of the entire manuscript. It reveals the Spirit of God's work in salvation, which is the first step in being a disciple of Christ. Without a person possessing eternal salvation, any effort to believe Bible doctrine and practice it would be futile.

Salvation is a work completed entirely by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jonah 2:9). Anyone that is saved is born again by the will of God, and not man (John 1:13). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-15). The Spirit of God was given to convict the sinner (John 6:44) and comfort the saint (John 14:18-27). Scriptures reveal that the Spirit of God first enlightens any sinner that is saved. The Word of God declares that an unbeliever is dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1). They do not have the Spirit of God within their heart (Romans 8:9). Apparently, the only hope they possess is in God. His act to reconcile the sinner is a move known as conviction or a drawing (John 6:44). In this attempt, the sinner's eyes are opened to the light of God's Word (Acts 16:14). They see their condition and are given a choice of salvation. When an unbeliever repents of his or her sins and places their faith in Jesus Christ, then God saves them and gives them a new life (Ephesians 2:1). They will be resurrected from death to life.

Once a sinner is saved, the Holy Spirit moves in their heart and abides there. The Spirit of God motivates and assists the new believer in manifesting the salvation that the Lord gave them. What God worked in their heart, they should work out (Philippians 2:12-13). He will guide them into all truth and help them fulfill the will of God for their life.

**"...and on profession of our faith (Acts 2:41; 8:37), having been baptized in the name of our Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19)..."**

The next step of obedience and growth for a new convert is that of believer's baptism. This is an ordinance that Jesus intends for His church to keep. We find His example in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:32-33. Then, we find His commandment to observe baptism in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15-16. It is this ordinance that the new convert expresses to everyone his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He or she is baptized because of a personal salvation. It is an outward profession of an inward possession.

Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the saint that is baptized is symbolizing the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new man. He or she is now at liberty to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Since baptism is a type or symbol, then the type must be fulfilled exactly. Many religions and cults have tried to distort the true meaning of baptism. In order for baptism to be a Scriptural baptism, three elements are necessary. First, the candidate must be a born again believer. Secondly, complete immersion in water is indispensable. Finally, baptism must be administered through a local New Testament church.

There is not one instance in the Word of God that implies or illustrates infant baptism. Additionally, the Bible does not teach nor suggest baptismal regeneration. All baptisms committed must be that of a believer in Christ. The Bible never commands a sinner to be baptized, only saints of God. Just those that have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ are candidates for baptism. This is taught in Acts 8:36-37 as the eunuch tried to be baptized before accepting Jesus as his Saviour. Philip instructed him that he must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God before he could be baptized.

Every account of baptism in the Scriptures reveals that the one being baptized was completely placed under water. Even the word baptism means to dip or immerse. Therefore, if the baptism is to be Biblical, then the candidate must be placed entirely under water. Since baptism is a picture of burial, then the type must be fulfilled with a complete dipping under water. Sprinkling an individual instead of immersing them is a foreign, misleading, and heretical doctrine according to the Word of God.

In view of the fact that baptism is a church ordinance, then the local church must carry forth this commandment. Only the pastor of the local church possesses the authority to baptize. The congregation gives this mandate to him as they have received sanction from their Head, Jesus Christ. Any baptism performed apart from a local church is an alien baptism. Baptism identifies an individual with Christ, and then the church. If a person is not willing to identify with the church, then they should not be considered as a candidate for baptism.

**“...we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Acts 2:42).”**

Commitment and faithfulness are two virtues that are missing in the days in which we are living (Luke 18:8). This is one reason for the Church Covenant. It is designed to encourage believers in Christ to make an allegiance and dedication with their life to God to obey His Word. So many times, we see spectators, procrastinators, dictators, and agitators without seeing any participators. God saved us so that we would serve Him in this life and the one to come (Luke 1:74-75, Revelation 22:3). In the days we are living, we need someone to fill in the gap and offer their lives as a sacrifice for God (Ezekiel 22:30, Isaiah 6:8).

In what areas can a Christian serve God? It may seem simple, but maintaining one's spiritual life is of great importance. Reading God's Word and allowing Him to teach us from it is very significant (Luke 24:45, John 5:39, Psalm 119:18). In order for a saint to be Spirit filled (Ephesians 5:18), they must first be Scripture filled (Colossians 3:16)! There must be a systematic schedule for daily Bible reading. At the least, believers should read their Bible through once a year.

Prayer is another area if one desires to maintain their spiritual life. God told us to pray and it is prayer that puts the power of God in our lives (I Thessalonians 5:17, Romans 12:12). It is imperative that we lay before God until we have His power on our lives (Luke 24:49). Any success in the ministry is attributed to the power of God (Acts 1:8). So many times people do not "have the time to pray". They have time for everything else, but when it comes to prayer, their time has run out. This needs to change in our lives. We need to exchange "Just A Little Talk With Jesus" to "Sweet Hour of Prayer"!

When a Christian is constantly praying and reading God's Word, the Lord will begin to speak. Believers should learn to listen to the voice of God (I Kings 19:11-13). When He says, "follow", we should follow (Matthew 4:19). Many times the Lord is calling, but no one is listening (Deuteronomy 4:36, Psalm 95:7, John 10:3, Hebrews 3:7, 15, 4:7).

Once the individuals Bible reading and prayer life is in order, then they should endeavor to be a faithful witness for the Lord. We have a tremendous message that the nations need to hear (Luke 24:46-47, John 20:21). One of the greatest works on the earth that a Christian can perform is leading others to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 4:29-30). In John 4:29-30, this harlot woman never gave a great dissertation about her life. She simply told them what Jesus did for her. Sometimes saints are intimidated when it comes to witnessing. They wonder what they will say and what they will answer. We should follow the example of this woman and Paul as they merely told others what happened to them (Luke 24:48). Keep in mind that we are not responsible for results (Isaiah 55:11). Our responsibility is to sow (Psalm 126:5-6, Matthew 13:3, Mark 4:3, Luke 8:5).

**"We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13), to walk together in Christian love (Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Thess. 4:9)..."**

Faith, hope, and charity are three virtues that every believer should possess. However, Paul informs us that the greatest of these is charity (I Corinthians 13:13). Charity is

simply brotherly love put into practice. It consists of benevolence and good will. Charity is more than mere words, but a performance.

Christians should walk together in sincere love enjoying fellowship. They share a common relationship because they have a common salvation (Jude 1:3). The Bible teaches that we ought to maintain a sense of partnership amongst the congregation (I Corinthians 1:9-10). As brothers and sisters in Christ grow in their love toward God, their love toward one another will grow also.

This fellowship may be pictured as a life with two planes. There is a vertical plane, which relates to the association with God. Then, there is the horizontal plane, which parallels with the affiliation with other saints. Both planes must be kept clear from any obstructions or the spiritual life of the saint will be depleted.

It is impossible to be wrong with another saint and be right with God. Sometimes this relationship is broken due to sin, carnality, and strife (I Corinthians 1:11-13). Anytime fellowship is broken in the body of Christ, sin is prominent. It will be evidenced in the wickedness of a backslidden heart (Proverbs 14:14). Amazingly, most divisions are over silly or insignificant things. During this time of strife sinners are dying and going to hell, missionaries are under supported, and worship is killed in the assembly.

**“...to strive for the advancement of this church (Eph. 2:21-23) in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), holiness (2 Cor. 7:1) and comfort (1 Thess. 5:14)...”**

One fact is certain and that is churches do not advance on its own. Progression is something achieved through hard work and sacrifice. God gave us the responsibility to advance (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8) and it is up to us to fulfill it. Many people feel that the church is nothing more than a social gathering, but the Bible teaches that it ought to be a soul-winning station. Its obligations are to see sinners saved, disciple new converts, edify the body of Christ, and worldwide missions. This is the vow taken when one pledges the Church Covenant.

According to the Covenant, we advance the church through three areas. These topics are knowledge, holiness, and comfort. Every church should strive to grow and perfect these subjects within their ministry.

Knowledge involves the areas of evangelism and discipleship. How can a sinner be saved unless he or she knows the truth (II Corinthians 4:3, John 8:32)? Then, after one is born again, they must be taught in the Word of God (Matthew 28:20, I Peter 2:2, II Peter 3:18). God has no desire for converts to remain babes in Christ (I Corinthians 3:1-3).

Christians should be familiar with the fundamental doctrines of the faith as an effort for the advancement of their beliefs. Most doctrines center on Jesus Christ and His way of salvation. Every believer should know and believe in the virgin birth (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23), the deity of Christ (I Timothy 3:16, John 1:1, John 1:14), the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:9, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 7:26, I Peter

2:22), the sacrifice of Jesus (II Corinthians 5:21, Isaiah 53:10, I Peter 2:21-24), the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:4, I Corinthians 15, Matthew 28:1-9), and the second coming of Christ (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Other fundamental doctrines should also be studied and embedded within a Christian's heart.

Holiness is the second element, according to the Church Covenant, that will assist in the advancement of the local church. God admonished us three times to "be ye holy" (Leviticus 20:7, I Peter 1:15, I Peter 1:16). When a believer surrenders his or her life to the indwelling Spirit, holiness is produced in their life. It is important to be right in doctrine, and it is essential to be right in our living. There are several instances in the Word of God that admonishes us to be holy (Romans 6:19, 22, II Corinthians 7:1, Hebrews 12:14).

Comfort is a final ingredient that the Church Covenant deems important in order for the church to advance. Being cold and heartless is not an attribute that Christians should possess. The Bible is plain to say that God is a God of all comfort (II Corinthians 1:3). We should imitate the ways of God and comfort other saints (II Corinthians 1:4, 7:13, Colossians 4:8, 11, I Thessalonians 5:11).

**"...to promote its prosperity and spirituality (Jude 1:20)..."**

If a congregation desires for their assembly to advance, they must focus their efforts on their spirituality. A carnal worldly church will accomplish absolutely nothing for the cause of Christ. Although numbers may be high and buildings are built, a lasting work for God will not be established. Having a large crowd and operating off "precious memories" is futile for the advancement of the church (Revelation 3:1). The tragic truth for many local churches is that they are saved, and that is as far as they are willing to go with God. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, admonishes us to "go on" (Hebrews 6:1). Certainly, the church will only be as strong as the individuals that make it up.

When we vow the Church Covenant, we make a promise that we will help to promote the spirituality of the body of Christ. What are some methods that God has chosen to help improve the church? These areas of growth are prayer, increasing in spiritual maturity, a consecrated walk, and being a faithful witness.

For a believer to attempt the Christian life without prayer is like trying to run a car without gasoline. The first thing that Paul told the church at Ephesus to do, under the direction of Timothy, is pray (I Timothy 2:1-2, 8). Even Jesus prayed, and if He had to pray, how much more does the saints! When Christians pray privately, the power of God will be added to their life. Then, when they assemble in a service publicly, they will be adding power to power.

Spiritual maturity is enhanced by development in the knowledge of God and His Word. It is amazing, but God desires for us to know His will for our life (Colossians 1:9, Acts 22:14, Ephesians 5:17). Knowing what the Lord wants for our life and following that is vital for a successful Christian life. The way that we find God's will for our life is

through His Word. God's desire for our life will never contradict what He has said in His Word.

Our circumspect walk will also assist the church in her prosperity and spirituality. The Scriptures offer several passages concerning our walk in this life. We are to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4), in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25), in love (Ephesians 5:2), in wisdom (Colossians 4:5), in the light (I John 1:7), and in the truth (III John 1:4). Walking in these things means that we will make our way and progression in these areas. Christians should have a worthy walk that pleases the Lord (Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10, I Thessalonians 2:12).

Why did the Lord leave us here after salvation? The answer to this question is the plentiful harvest that remains (Matthew 9:37, Luke 10:2). Every saint of God ought to be a witness sounding forth the Word of God (I Thessalonians 1:6-8). God has saved us and sent us into this world to see other sinners born again (John 20:21). In order to be an effective witness you must know (John 9:25), tell others what you know (John 4:29), and then live so that others will know (II Corinthians 3:2). We must realize that we are the only lights shining in this dark world (John 9:5, Matthew 5:14). How can a sinner ever be saved unless they know the way that the Lord has set (John 14:6)?

**“...to sustain its worship (Heb. 10:25), ordinances (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-34), discipline (Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5) and doctrines (Acts 2:42; 2 John 1:9-11)...”**

Probably one of the most important essentials in a local church is possessing and maintaining a spirit of worship in the services. The only way to experience this is for the members to have a humble attitude, obey the Bible, and enjoy the right relationships amongst one another.

Humility is obtained by a simple recognition of the authorities in one's life (Titus 3:1, Romans 13:1, I Peter 2:17). Thinking of others instead of self is a must if one is to be humble (Philippians 2:3). The enemy to humility is the sin of rebellion (I Samuel 15:23). Rebellion is a horrible sin that will destroy any assembly.

Consistently obeying the Word of God is the key to order in the church. Members should strive to adhere to the Scriptures and not fight against what God has said. Whether we realize it or not, our testimony will influence others. It should be the desire for the Christian to provoke others to godliness and good works instead of sin (Hebrews 10:24).

Right relationships consist of proper speech, gentleness, and meekness (Titus 3:2). True Christians will watch their words, walk, and witness. When an individual displays an unruly spirit within a local congregation, eventually, that spirit will rub off on others (Proverbs 15:18). Believers should endeavor to maintain unity amongst the assembly instead of division (Ephesians 4:3).

God gave two ordinances to the local church. These are baptism and the Lord's Supper. They should be administered correctly and according to their types. Any assembly that does not carry forth these is not a genuine church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From time to time, it is necessary to practice discipline within the church. This should be done Scripturally under the leadership of the pastor. The members of the church should back up the pastor as he stands on the Word of God.

Who will continue the doctrines of Christ? According to the Scriptures, it is the obligation of the believer to learn, instruct, and practice the doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded us to teach all nations (Matthew 28:19). What we have learned we should commit to others (II Timothy 2:2).

One of the marks of the last days is that doctrines of devils will creep in the church (I Timothy 4:1). This should not be so. It is the obligation of the pastor to disciple his sheep in the Word of God that they would not be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14).

**“...to give it a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin (Acts 5:26-29)...”**

According to this phrase of the revised Church Covenant, we see the importance of obeying the Word of God instead of the word of man. This is not to say that we are not to follow the laws of the land, but it implies that if the laws of the land contradict the Bible, we are to follow the Scriptures instead of the wicked laws.

As long as the laws of the land do not disagree with the Bible, we should comply with them. Jesus gave the example of this principle (Matthew 22:21, Luke 20:25). Paul informed the Romans that the government was an institution of God and should be obeyed (Romans 13:1-10).

However, when the laws go contrary to what God has said, believers are to stick with the Scriptures. This belief is seen in Acts 5:26-29. Peter and the apostles were forbidden to preach and teach the Word of God. The Lord has instructed us to go into the entire world and preach the gospel. By obeying this commandment, they faced opposition and broke the law. They continued to preach and teach, and received persecution for it. Peter and the apostles gave their commitment to God “sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin”.

**“...and to contribute cheerfully and regularly (1 Cor. 16:2) to the support of the ministry (Matt. 10:10; Gal. 6:6), the expenses of the church (Malachi 3:8-10), the relief of the poor (Acts 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:1-5), and the spread of the Gospel through all nations (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8).”**

In this portion of the Church Covenant, we see the importance of giving and the financing of the ministry. Some would say that we should not discuss money and funds,

but it is mentioned over 700 times in the Bible. Certainly, if a preacher is to preach the whole counsel of God's Word, he will have to preach about money. Others believe that it is hard to worship God when the preacher is talking about money, but according to the Scriptures, it is impossible to worship God without giving (Exodus 25:2, Leviticus 27:30, Ezra 7:16, Malachi 3:8-10, I Corinthians 16:1-3, II Corinthians 8-9). From these passages, we see the three methods of giving as tithes, freewill offerings, and faith promise missions.

The Church Covenant simply states what the Scriptures already declare. Each member of the church is under a Scriptural obligation to give. Giving is merely following the example that Jesus set while He was living on the earth (II Corinthians 8:9). Jesus gave willingly, cheerfully, liberally, unselfishly, and sacrificially. Christians should follow this example and watch their attitude while they perform the action of benevolence (Mark 10:45, II Corinthians 9:7). Some view giving as a loss, but it is not. Giving is a gain (Luke 6:38). God is not unrighteous to forget our labor of love and will multiply the seed sown (Hebrews 6:10, II Corinthians 9:10).

As a Christian's faith grows, so will their giving (II Corinthians 8:7). They will begin to abound in this "grace" also. A careful study of the word "grace" in II Corinthians 8-9 will reveal that "grace" is giving. Grace giving far exceeds the ten percent of the tithe. It is going beyond ourselves and allowing God to give to us and through us (II Corinthians 8:1-3).

Amazingly, the whole concept of giving reveals the provisions of the Lord. The only way we can yield our increase is if the Lord gives to us first (II Corinthians 9:8). Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. Any money that we receive we must remember that it is God giving to us what we do not deserve. Many feel that they have earned that money and no one has the right to tell them what to do with it. The only problem with this idea is that God gave them the air to breathe and the ability to work so that they could earn the funds. If God gave us what we really deserve we would all be in hell with our back broke.

Giving is the only method that God chose to finance His church. If every believer gives as God has prospered him or her, then all of the financial obligations of the church will be met. Churches should not resort to worldly practices such as cake sales, cookie sales, calendar sales, car washes, and yard sales to meet the needs of the church. The world should have no claims on "helping the church out" (Genesis 14:21-24).

**We also engage to maintain family (Deut. 6:1-12; 11:18-20) and private devotions (Matt. 6:6); to religiously educate our children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:1-12); to seek the salvation of our kindred, acquaintances (Mark 5:19; Luke 5:19), and all others..."**

The church will not be any greater than the homes that make it up. There is a tremendous necessity to bring the Spirit filled life home. This portion of the Church Covenant stresses the importance of maintaining spirituality in the home. It has been well said that, "As goes the homes, so goes the nation". We could also apply this principle to

the church and say, “As goes the homes, so goes the church”. When our homes are destroyed, then our church and nation will crumble. Whether we realize it or not, the actions that take place in the home will affect the services and work of the local church.

Many times churches are out of order because families are out of order. Definitely, God is a God of order (I Corinthians 14:40). Even in creation, we see the regulation that the Lord used. Since the Lord uses order, then He desires for His churches to be in order. The only way that the churches can be in order is if the homes are in order. God has given the home an arrangement that should never be broken. Christ is the Head of the church and the husband is the head of the home (Ephesians 5:23). Next, there must be a submissive wife under the leadership of her husband (Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18). Finally, children are to obey their parents and be under their direction (Ephesians 6:1-3, Colossians 3:20). When this chain of command is severed, then utter chaos will dominate within the family and church.

Paul instructed us how the husband is to behave himself (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 6:4, Colossians 3:19). He is not the taskmaster of the home, but he is the leader. The responsibilities of leading his family in the ways of the Lord fall upon his shoulders. Clearly, he is to provide for his family physically, mentally, and spiritually (I Timothy 5:8, II Thessalonians 3:6-15). He should be a faithful employee earning the appropriate funds to provide for his family (Colossians 3:22-24). It is his responsibility to see that his children receive a Christian education both academically and practically (Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:1-7).

The husbands are to make sure that they maintain family and secret devotions. How can a husband and father lead his home in devotions with God unless he already practices this consecration? Many times the women are the spiritual leaders of the home. This should not be the case. Anytime a man brags about his wife being more spiritual than he is, it reveals that he is falling short of his God given responsibilities. He should set the example for his family and teach them to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances.

Wives are to arrange themselves under the leadership of their husband (Ephesians 5:23-24). This does not mean that the husband is a dictator, but it does mean that he will stand before God for his home. Women should realize this and allow their husband to be the decision maker. Women’s rights activists and ERA has absolutely torn down Biblical guidelines. Feminist’s movements promote their rebellion with equal rights. What it boils down to is that they hate God and His Word. They are filled with rebellion!

We should believe in women’s rights. They have the right to obey their husbands in everything, love their husband, love their children, be chaste, and keepers at home (Titus 2:4-8, I Timothy 5:14). Anytime a woman would leave the home (throwing her children off on the daycares, babysitters, parents, and grandparents) she is out of place. Her responsibility, pleasure, and honor should be the home and not 401K. Thank God, there was a concerned mother in the life of Timothy! Where would he be without a praying mother and grandmother (II Timothy 1:5, 3:15)? Not only did Timothy have a concerned

mother, but he also had a concerned mother with a vision. Even king Lemuel described his virtuous mother in Proverbs 31:1-10.

How do the young women learn to be virtuous women and guide the house? How do they learn to find pleasure in their God-given roles as wives and mothers? This is the responsibility of the aged women (Titus 2:3-5). Their mission is to teach the younger women to be reverent in their demeanor. The only way that they can do this is by example. Sometimes, young women think they know it all, but they need to be quiet (I Thessalonians 4:11) and listen to the hoary head that has lived for God (Proverbs 16:31).

**“...to walk circumspectly in the world (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:15); to be just in our dealings (Rom. 12:17), faithful to our engagements (Eph. 4:25), and exemplary in our deportment (Eph. 5:8); to avoid all tattling (Eph. 4:31; 1 Tim. 5:13), backbiting (2 Cor. 12:20), and excessive anger (Eph. 4:26, 31)...”**

When a believer vows the Church Covenant, they should realize that their deportment is of importance. Noah Webster, in his 1828 dictionary, defines “deportment” as, “Carriage; manner of acting in relation to the duties of life; behavior; demeanor; conduct; management.” This covers the area of Christian character and conduct. Certainly, if a saint of God is not mindful of his or her behavior they will not have any kind of godly testimony in the community.

The first step in a Christian life is learning how to walk circumspectly (Ephesians 5:15). Webster defines “circumspectly” as, “Cautiously; with watchfulness every way; with attention to guard against surprise or danger.” Believers should be cautious and watchful about their speech, actions, and even the places they go (Matthew 26:41). Our body is not our own to do with it what we please (I Corinthians 6:19-20). We should shine the gospel light in this wicked world with much caution.

Being just in our engagements is another “must” if we are to have a godly testimony in this dark world. Christians should be known for telling the truth and keeping commitments instead of lying and breaking contracts (Ephesians 4:25). If we tell someone that we are going to do or pay something, we should do exactly what we pledged. Many times a good testimony is ruined because a saint will not pay his or her bills. Several passages command us to pay what we have vowed (Ecclesiastes 5:4, Jonah 2:9, II Corinthians 8:10-11).

Exemplary in our deportment relates to being an example of what God said in His Word (John 13:15, I Peter 2:21). In order to be an example one must learn to control his temperament. He or she must never allow Satan to influence them to do wrong (Ephesians 4:27). They must determine to live an honest life before all men (I Thessalonians 4:12, Romans 13:13).

What kind of an example would a believer be if he or she is constantly tattling, backbiting, and manifesting excessive anger? Paul admonishes us to flee from this wicked lifestyle (Ephesians 4:29-32). The way to tell what is in a person's heart is to listen

to what comes out of their mouth (Matthew 12:33-37). The tongue is a very destructive force (Proverbs 18:21, James 3:1-12)! Be not deceived by those that say they are saved, but cannot control their tongue (James 1:26). Their religion is vain! Manifesting an uncontrolled tongue and displaying an unruly temper is foreign to Christianity.

**“...to abstain from worldly amusements such as movie attendance, gambling, rock music, and dancing; to be free from all oath-bound secret societies and partnerships with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14)...”**

An important part of walking circumspectly in the world is abstaining from all appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). This would include sins such as public movie attendance. The Bible is plain to inform us to flee from abominations which Hollywood is popular for producing (Deuteronomy 7:26, Psalm 101:2-3, 7). Gambling is another sin many commit (Proverbs 23:5, 28:8, 28:20, 28:22, I Timothy 6:10, 6:17, Exodus 20:17). It is so addictive that they even gambled around the cross of Christ (Matthew 27:35, Luke 23:34, John 19:24). Rock music (or any kind of worldly music that does not glorify God) and worldly dancing are two sins that go hand-in-hand. From the time of Moses to the present, the Devil has been promoting this wickedness (Exodus 32:17-19, Job 21:7, 11, I John 2:15). Christians only sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16). Secret societies such as Masons, Shriners, and such like are wicked organizations that believers have no part belonging to (II Corinthians 6:14). These sins, and others, are to be avoided. Remember, only fools make a mock at sin (Proverbs 14:9).

**“...to abstain from the sale (Habakkuk 2:15) or use of tobacco in any form, narcotic drugs, or intoxicating drink as a beverage (1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5); and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of our Saviour (Acts 1:8; 8:4).”**

One of the greatest contradictions in terms is a Christian alcoholic. According to the Word of God, this phrase is an absurdity (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Strong drink has no place in a saint of God's life (Ephesians 5:18, Leviticus 10:9, Proverbs 20:1, 23:20-21, 29-35, 31:4, Isaiah 5:11, 22, 28:7). The Bible even declares that we are not to sale it (Habakkuk 2:15). Certainly, the Scriptures forbid the use or sale of intoxicating drinks as a beverage.

Alcohol absolutely destroys individuals, families, and nations. From the time of Noah to the present, strong drink has shattered lives. It will rob an individual of one's health and wealth. Fermented wine leads to perversity and immorality. Beer, wine, moonshine, cocktails, alcohol, liquor, spirits, whiskey, rum, gin, vodka, skotch, rye, champagne, and brandy are wicked and evil in the sight of God.

Instead of someone being addicted to drink, they should be passionate about the efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour. The only hope for a drunkard is to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Churches should try with all their might to get the gospel to the world so that they can abstain from this liquid devil, alcohol. Alcohol is not a disease, but a sin. If alcohol was a disease, then it is the only disease that America bottles and sales. Jesus is the only answer for a drunkard!

**We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10); to remember each other in prayer (Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:25); to aid each other in sickness and distress (Gal. 6:10); to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling (1 Cor. 12:25-26) and courtesy of speech (Titus 3:2; Col. 4:6)...**

A great attribute of Christianity is sacrifice. We see this in Jesus' comments in Matthew 25:35-36. When one is in need, it is the obligation of other believers to help them. The early church would sell their property in order to meet the needs of another brother or sister in Christ (Acts 2:44-45, II Corinthians 8:14). One of the most powerful elements Christians possess is prayer. It does not cost anything to pray, and mighty works can be accomplished through prayer. When a saint is sick or in distress, a kind word or an act of sympathy from another saint will do great wonders in encouraging that believer.

**“...to be slow to take offense (Rom. 12:19), but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour, and to secure reconciliation without delay (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-18).”**

The Bible declares that Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Since that is true, then we should follow His example (Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:17-21). Possessing peace and practicing peace are essential if a local assembly plans to advance the church. Constant strife and divisions will hinder any congregation. In order to maintain peace within a church, we must be slow to take offense, always be ready for reconciliation, and be mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it immediately.

Being slow to take offense is simply doing what Christ did (I Peter 2:23, Isaiah 53:7). Patience is a great asset when dealing with people (Ephesians 4:32). Several people carry their feelings on their shoulders and, seemingly, look for something to “blow up” about. Self-vindication, revenge, and “getting even” will never settle any dispute.

Christians must realize that offences will come (Luke 17:1). The way that a believer should respond to such offences is always being ready for reconciliation. Unforgiveness is a sin that will destroy one's spiritual life. If we do not learn to forgive others, then we will not be forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15). It is futile for one to worship God with unforgiveness in their heart (James 3:14-16, Matthew 5:23-24).

The rules of our Saviour is, first, do not be offensive (Luke 17:2). Instead of operating on “my rights”, why not try surrendering your will to keep offences from happening. Secondly, Christians should be ready to forgive (Ephesians 4:32). So many people operate forgiveness on their terms. They want the offensive party to be on their hands and knees before they will even listen. Some, no matter how many times an apology is made, will never forgive nor forget. If this is the case, then the church should become involved (Matthew 18:15-20). An unforgiving spirit should not be tolerated in a church. It is the church's responsibility to cast out the scorner (Proverbs 22:10).

**We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church of like faith where we can carry out the spirit**

**of this covenant and the principles of God’s Word (Acts 18:27-28; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:23).”**

Not one portion of Scripture endorses or promotes Christians having a “home church”, television pastor, or radio pastor. The Word of God sanctions the local New Testament church. God gave two ordinances that He expects believers to observe, and they cannot do that apart from the church.

From time to time, believers have to move away from their church. When this occurs, they should already have a church to go to in the area they are moving. This church should believe and practice the same doctrines that the church they left did.

Church membership should consist of only one church. Having a membership in thirty churches is not a good practice nor Biblical. They should tithe, be faithful, and serve the Lord in the church that God has placed them.

This is a sum of the Church Covenant. It is not intended to be an exhaustive explanation, but a guideline to follow. It is our vow or promise, which we make to the Lord and other members of the local church. We should endeavor to keep it and practice it daily. It is a serious, sacrificial, and sacred promise. Like our marriage vows, we should not take it lightly. We should walk what we talk.