
The Chapel Covenant: Who?

Titus 2

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Introduction

This morning we will be continuing in our series on Membership at the Chapel. To date we've discussed the Old and New Testament cases for being formally identified with God's people (what we call in this present day and place membership), stewardship, and last week we started the first of two parts on the Chapel Covenant. As a very brief refresher, the Chapel Covenant is a section of the Chapel Book of Faith and Order that outlines what the expectations are of those who are members. All persons coming into membership at the Chapel are required to commit themselves, by God's grace, to striving to fulfill these expectations. Last week we noted from Titus 2 that where the gospel is present, gospel-living will be present. This is a biblical pattern, it is a necessary outworking of the transformed life that all believers are in possession of, a protection to the integrity of the church, and a witness to the unbelieving world. In short, the attitudes, behaviors, and words of a Christian matter because the gospel is true.

This morning we want to turn our attention fully to the actual Chapel Covenant itself. This sermon will be a bit different in that we will not be working our way through a passage – though we will be referencing the Word frequently – instead, we'll be working our way through the points of the Chapel Covenant. My aim is to familiarize you with the Covenant in its detail and to help you see more of our Savior along the way. [Pray]

Chapel Covenant

I've divided the 16 bullets of the covenant up into three separate sections for consideration – the first is a High View of the Church, the second is Love for People, and the third Personal Holiness – and apart from those, one overarching point which really brings them all together. We will start with that one – Chapel members covenant:

To walk in obedience to the Scriptures by loving the Lord God with all our heart, all our souls, and all our minds.

For many of you, this point should ring familiar. Jesus, in Matthew 22:37 says ***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*** Effectively, all the other points of the Chapel Covenant flow from this first one taken from Matthew 22.

In this passage, Jesus is responding to a group of Pharisees who had asked, ***What is the greatest commandment in the law?*** This question was part trap for Jesus but it was also part exposure of the Pharisees' heart. You see, the Pharisees had built a whole religion, called Judaism, which basically said people could please God by doing enough good things, by knowing the *commands* and following them. In their gross arrogance, they believed they could make God owe them eternal life and earthly blessing by being so good that he would

be obligated to reward them. They wildly overestimated their own ability to be good and wildly underestimated the absolute purity of God's goodness – that is, his holiness, his standard for our lives.

Jesus is careful to not let the first and second greatest commands become the final point of the discussion. Why? Because, it would have left the Pharisees where they were, in their delusional state. If the conversation would have stopped there it is very likely they would have looked at one another and thought, "Maybe Jesus is not as big of an issue as we thought – we've been living this way for years... we are basically good people who make the cut, and we are really good at pointing out when others don't..." Jesus' response to their question, sharing the 1st and 2nd greatest commandments, was a well-placed segue way.

You see, these commandments were not news, necessarily, to the Pharisees (see Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 18:19)... they had been familiar with this kind of language from the time they were kids. But familiarity had not ensured understanding – they did not have ears to hear. Hence, they had reduced these two greatest commands to a series of tightly specified behaviors that they thought they could live out... all the while missing entirely the "who" behind these commands.

This may sound strange, but it is really not. We hear and see it all the time today – even in the church. It sounds like this... "ya, ya, ya, about all that Jesus and God and Bible stuff... just tell me what I need to do... let's keep it simple and achievable, let's not get wrapped up in what I believe, etc."

Jesus, knowing the Pharisees hearts, begins to build his response right at the point they were missing. They did not understand who God was and therefore could not love him with all their hearts, and souls, and minds. So he asks them a question that cuts directly to the root of the matter- it was the question they should have been asking - ***What do you think about the Christ?*** (22:41ff). Not "what would Jesus do?" But "who is Jesus." And with this question he begins to tear apart their view of the world, of religion, and of themselves...

In Matthew 23:1-36 Jesus proceeds to verbally eviscerate the Pharisees – condemning them, even damning them, for their legalism, that is, their haughty belief that they could be good enough to win God's approval by behaving in certain ways. They were wrong and if we were to believe similarly about the Chapel Covenant or any other list of "to dos" we would be wrong too.

I share this to be sure that we understand that the Christian life is not a set of checkboxes that must be checked. It is a person that must be loved and worshipped, with all of our heart, our soul, and our mind. The Chapel Covenant is *merely* a set of biblically-derived principles that are evidences, the outworkings, of our faith and trust in Christ. Adherence cannot save. Only Christ can save those who have come to believe they need saved and there is no other way than confessing in their heart that Christ is Lord and Savior.

To keep front and center the reality that the person of Christ (not a set of attitudes, words, and behaviors) is the focal point of our faith, we'll consider with each grouping of points in the Chapel Covenant, how Christ exemplifies and accomplishes, on our behalf, all that God has called us to be.

High View of the Church

On the screen you will see the six points that I have placed under the heading “High View of the Church.” I’ll let you peruse those on your own.

What was Christ’s view of the church? Why did Christ come to Earth? Well, it was to redeem for himself, his Father, a people that would be known as the church, the body of Christ (Titus 2:14). In Matthew 16 Christ makes his intent clear by asking Peter, one of his disciples, a key question we have already heard once this morning *...who do you say that I am?* Peter says, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* Jesus responds revealing his mission, *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven* (vv. 13-19).

Christ intends to build the church in to a kingdom comprised of all nations and he will use the church to do the work. In Matthew 28 we have from Christ what is commonly referred to as the “Great Commission.” He says, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”* (vv.16ff).

Christ loves and prays for the church. In John 17 Christ is engaging in some of his very last acts before the crucifixion. In praying – he asks God the Father for much on our behalf, *For I have given them the words that you gave me... Holy Father, keep them in your name... While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.* (vv.8, 11, 12, 20).

Christ, through the word will feed the church. In John 6:35 he says, *I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

And, as we will see repeatedly this morning, it all culminates in the cross. Christ gave all for the church. *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for man* (Mark 10:45).

We could go on for many more verses. Beloved, Christ has a high view of the church and its ministry of the Word. Those who know him well will too. Be clear, your love for Christ will be directly proportionate to your love for the things he loves. This gets intensely practical (and personal) very quickly. Why won’t you rearrange your life to attend the adult Bible education hour? or Sunday evening services? or Wednesday flock meetings? While in some cases there are legitimate, valid, and God-pleasing reasons... in many cases, perhaps most, what lacks is love for the king and/or knowledge of what he loves. Christ loves the church. Dear ones, come to the table, feast with your brothers and sisters on the banquet laid out for you every time the body gathers. The food and drink of Jesus Christ give life.

Love for People

On the screen, you will see the next five points of the Chapel Covenant. I have organized these under the category called Love for People.

Jesus love for people is continually recorded in the Gospels. It is poignantly expressed in his tender love for the lost, ***O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!*** (Matthew 23:37).

In John 11 as we see Jesus preparing to raise Lazarus from the dead, we see his tears of compassion – for those suffering and struggling to believe: ***And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept... Then Jesus, deeply moved, came to the tomb... Jesus said to [Martha], “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” [Jesus] cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”***

In Mark 10 we see Jesus aggressive and protective love for the simple, the vulnerable, and those with a purity of faith – in this case children ***And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them...*** (vv. 13-16).

In John 13 and 19 we see Jesus eternal love and provide for his spiritual family and his earthly family. At Jesus' final meal with his disciples, John tells us that, ***...when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end... (13:1) I will ask the father and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... (13:16,17) [at the cross] When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home*** (19:26,27).

And again we return to the cross to see Christ's ultimate expression of love for his people. Instead of the Gospels, we will go to the prophet Isaiah who, in great detail, describes the expression of Christ's love on the cross: ***He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*** (v.3)... ***But we were wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed*** (v.5)... ***All we like sheep we have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth*** (vv. 6-7)... ***Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief*** (v.10)... ***he poured out his soul to death and was***

numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors (v.12).

Beloved, Christ loves his people, oh, how he has loved his people. 1 John tells us that if we love Christ, we will love his people, sacrificially, redemptively, purely, continually, with forgiveness and humility. We are blessed to see this happening all over the Chapel all the time – however – that should not keep each of us from intentionally reflecting on whether or not this is how we love. To what degree will you allow the needs of God’s people to inconvenience you? To what degree will you give up the things you personally prize to serve God’s people? And in doing these things, for miserably undeserving people like myself, are you content to suffer silently, trusting God... for the joy set before you humbling yourself to the greatest of sacrifices for your brother or sister?

Pursuit of Personal Holiness

On the slides you will see the third and last category of points in the Chapel Covenant. I have categorized these under the heading Pursuit of Personal Holiness. We will consider just two brief examples of this.

First, consider Christ’s words to the crowds in Luke 14: *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and bothers an sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple... So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple* (vv. 25-26, 33)

This indeed, is what Christ did – *though he was in the form of God... made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant... becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:6-8) He renounced all... that he might, in obedience, follow the Father’s will.

Second, we can go to the Garden of Gesthemane, where Jesus, just before being led away to his own death is praying to God the Father in Luke 22: *...[He] knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done”* (vv. 41-42).

Christ’s pursuit of personal holiness entailed an obedience of the heart that was manifested in behaviors and words that demonstrated his ultimate allegiance to God his Father. He subjected all areas of his life to the Father’s will. He submitted fully. What a challenge that is to us – so many areas in life where we knowingly or unknowingly refuse to bring our lives into conformity, through wisdom, with the will of God. Whether it is submitting to a husband, sacrificially leading a wife and household, giving money to the church, being patient toward children, stewarding our bodies – we all have much room for growth into this utter submission that we see in Christ to his Father – producing a personal holiness that brings glory to God.

Conclusion

Well, you can’t keep it. The Chapel Covenant – you can’t keep your promise to keep it. You and I have undoubtedly already violated it today in some way. But beloved, as we have been

reflecting on repeatedly throughout the morning, Christ *has* kept it and brilliantly so. Because of what God has done through Christ's life, death, and resurrection ***[we] are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord"*** (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31). To say it plainly, Christ is our righteousness, he is our merit, our earned favor before God. In his life as a man, he perfectly obeyed the Father even unto death and he now shares his righteousness with us. God demanded perfection – holiness, and Christ has supplied it for us. But there is more, in his death, he took our punishment for sin upon himself – freeing us wholly from the penalty. ***For our sake [God made Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*** (2 Corinthians 5:21). God demanded death for any sin, all sin, and Christ has supplied it for us. He died in our place.

Is the Chapel covenant a call to a certain kind of living in the Church? Yes, it is. But beloved, it is a call to much, much, much more than that and it can never be only that. It is a call to the living Christ, our righteousness, our sin-bearer, our life. When you read the Chapel Covenant, reflect on Christ *first* for it is meant to point us to him – not to ourselves and our own efforts. Then rejoice. He has obeyed for us. He has suffered and died for us. And, he has also enabled us by grace – something we've talked around this morning but not mentioned directly...

Let me close by contradicting myself. Earlier I said that you could not keep the Chapel Covenant. I will end by saying that you can keep the Chapel Covenant. Grace, the enabling power given by God because we are at peace with him through the work of the cross, provides all that we need to obey and overcome sin. Hence, the Chapel Covenant is a call to live in the reality of who we are as believers. There is no better place you could live, no more joyful place you could abide, no more beautiful place you could dwell than in the life-transforming reality of the gospel. Believer, be who you are for Christ has given you all that you need.

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all."

And now complete in Him,
My robe, His righteousness,
Close sheltered 'neath His side,
I am divinely blest.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy pow'r, and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.