

The Church Covenant Part 1

A sermon by Pastor Byron Chesney July 24, 2016 during the PM service.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Tonight with the help of the Lord, I would like for us to examine our Church covenant in line with the Scriptures.

Let me preface this message by saying the Church covenant is not the same as our Statement of Faith, that message will be for another time. This message is solely dealing with the covenant that you, as a member of Highland Baptist Church, whether you realized it or not, agreed to uphold and abide by. Our Church, like nearly every other Baptist Church you go in, has a Church covenant hanging on the wall. I made copies of it and that is what you have in your hands right now.

Just as we preached this morning about God's covenant with His people being similar to a contract which binds two parties together under an agreement that each side will uphold their end, the Church covenant is also an agreement that we, as Church members promise to uphold. It is a promise to each other as members, to God as part of the Body of Christ, and to ourselves.

The Church Covenant that we go by here in our Church originated way back in 1833 with the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. If you are not familiar with the New Hampshire Confession it was drawn up by Rev. John Newton Brown of New Hampshire and was adopted by the New Hampshire Baptist Convention. The whole reason for writing it was that they were trying to separate themselves from the false teaching of Calvinist Baptists and their Philadelphia Confession of Faith and from the Primitive Baptists and the Free Will Baptists. Then in 1869 a man named J.M. Pendleton published the Church covenant in his Baptist Church Manual, which is still in use today. I've got one down in my study.

Remember, the word **CHURCH** comes from the Greek word, **ekklesiá**, which is a called out assembly. I want us to remember what the definition of a local church is: A local church is a group of baptized believers who voluntarily join themselves together to carry out the Great Commission.

There are certain things that identify the local New Testament Church:

1. The head of the Church is the Lord Jesus.
2. The Church only has two Biblical offices, Pastors and Deacons.
3. The Church is to be Pastor led.
4. The Deacons are to assist the Pastor and to see that the Widows and needy are taken care of.
5. The Church has a saved membership.
6. The Church is to observe the ordinances of; baptism and the Lord's Supper
7. The Church members are to be equipped to go into the world to preach the Gospel.

Those are 7 basic markings of a New Testament Church, which we are. However, the Bible very clearly points out certain things that every Church member is responsible for

So that is where the covenant originated from. Now let's look at the actual covenant and see how it lines up with the Scriptures. Because after all, if it doesn't line up with the Scriptures then it has no business in the Church.

This Church adopts the Baptist Church Covenant as follows:

"Having been led, = One thing is for sure. If you are truly saved then you were led by the Spirit to be saved. There is no salvation outside of God's leading or drawing. **Jesus himself tells us in John 6:44: No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.**

If you are a member of this Church or if you come to this Church regularly then you have also been LED to be here. There was a time in the past that you were seeking for a Church and the Holy Spirit prompted you to consider Highland Baptist Church as the Church you would like to attend. Hopefully you were being LED by the Spirit.

as we believe, = I want you to recognize that this covenant incorporates everyone. The word "WE" is used here. It is what WE believe. It is how WE have been led. Who are the WE? The Body of Christ, the members of this Church. Turn with me to **1 Corinthians 12:12-31 READ FROM BIBLE**

by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour; = The Church began with Jesus Christ and His disciples and was empowered on the Day of Pentecost. Anyone that became a member of the Church did so after being saved: **Acts 2:46-47: And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**

One of the qualifications of being a Church member is that you must be saved. Nowhere in the Bible will you find members of the Church that are not saved. That's not saying that some people haven't joined that were not saved, there will always be those that slip in unsaved but to be a true member of the Body of Christ you must be saved.

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, = **Matthew 28:19: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ==** Again, on the day of Pentecost when the Church was empowered we read: **Acts 2:41: Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.**

So, full submersion baptism is a standard requirement to join a Baptist Church. Baptism does not save you. It is what you do after you have been saved. Baptism is symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is an outward expression of an inner change inside of our hearts. It is identifying us with Christ. A saved person by being baptized is identifying himself or herself with Christ through baptism.

When we admit someone as a member here they can join in one of three different ways:

1. **They can join by statement of faith.** This means that the person desiring to join states the he or she has by faith trusted the Lord Jesus as their Savior and we take their word for it, vote on them, and admit them into our fellowship.
2. **They can join by letter** from another Baptist Church. If you are already a member of a Baptist Church then it is assumed that you were a member there

under the same qualifications that our Baptist Church upholds. We then vote and request a letter of recommendation from the previous Church.

3. **They can join by trusting** Jesus as their Savior and being baptized into the body of Christ.

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. = So this covenant is between each other and the Lord. When we joined this Church we promised to enter into this covenant with joy. We realize that we made this promise in the presence of God and His Church body and that we are a member of that body.

Romans 12:3-5: For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, = Each Church member is to be Spirit led. Not feelings led but Spirit led. The only way to be Spirit led is if you are walking in the Spirit. In order to walk in the Spirit you must be living a separated, holy life free from sin and corruption.

to walk together in Christian love; = John 15:12: This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

1 Thessalonians 4:9: But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

As a Church member and part of the body of Christ, you should have love toward your fellow Church member. Maybe you are thinking to yourself, "well I could never love so and so, you don't know what they have done to me or said about me." Oh really, what about what Jesus did for you? **Romans 5:8:** But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; = 2 Peter 3:18: But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

The Church is to constantly be in a state of growth and advancement. What if the Jerusalem Church never went out of the confines of Jerusalem? Where would Christianity be today if they kept it all to themselves and did not fulfill the Great Commission?

Ephesians 4:14-16: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

A perfect example of Christian growth and advancement can be found in the Apostle Paul. Despite all of his years of education and experience he still said this: **Philippians 3:13-14:** Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this

one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. -- Paul was constantly advancing. That is what we as a Church are to be doing.

to promote its prosperity, = Ephesians 5:25-27: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

While the world may not think much about the Church, I want you to know that the Church is a big deal to the Lord. So big of a deal that he gave his life for it. As a member of the Body of Christ you too should think it is a big deal.

The Church isn't just a building that come to attend when services are happening. Church is a way of life. It is part of who we are. There isn't just one person that runs it all. Everyone is equal in membership. Even I as your Pastor am just being an undershepherd. We are all in this thing together and we should all be part of everything that goes on here.

Whether or not you were aware of it or not, when you became a member here you agreed to this covenant that you would promote the prosperity of this Church. That means that you will do your part to see that this Church is profitable. That doesn't mean we have a large bank account but that we are profitable in the work of the Church.

and spirituality = 1 Thessalonians 5:19: Quench not the Spirit. We are to have a spiritual Church. The only way to have a spiritual Church is to have spiritual people as members. I'm afraid too many times we quench the Spirit in the Church by not being obedient to the Spirit. This morning I could feel the Spirit so real in our service but I felt like somebody was not stepping up and doing what the Spirit was nudging them to do.

to sustain its worship, = Hebrews 10:25: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. The only way to sustain the worship at the Church is if its members are present in the services. I don't harp a lot about Church attendance but maybe I need to start. I realize we do not have a huge number of people but if everyone that had their name on our Church roll book was present and accounted for during worship, we would be filled to overflowing. Being faithful to your Church takes three things; 1. Love for it, 2. Obedience to God 3. Discipline.

Did you know that Barna research statistics show that there are around 4,000 churches a year in the United States that close their doors permanently due to lack of support from members. People just stop going to Church. -- If you are a member of this Church you are expected to attend if at all possible. I don't think I have to tell you that I understand when you cannot but if you are mentally and physically able to attend, you should be here when we are having services. -- that is the only way we can sustain our services.

I want to stop here. There is just way too much left to try and fit it all in this evening. So, we will pick back up on this on Wednesday evening, Lord willing