

## Basis of the Covenant

The purpose of this article is to take an in-depth look at the covenant from four aspects in relationship to the believer and the church. Those aspects are (a) salvation and baptism, (b) members duties to the church, (c) members duties in personal Christian living and (d) duties to other members.



Allow the writer to begin this discussion with salvation and baptism (John 1:11-12; Matthew 28:19-20) by saying, once a person believe on the name Jesus and accept Him in faith, we then become adopted sons of God. True faith, belief and trust in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on Calvary's cross leads to salvation. However, salvation is initiated by God and given as a free gift out of His love for mankind. Upon receiving our free gift of salvation, we then are baptized with the Holy Spirit; our water baptism is symbolic of what has taken place between the believer and God. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit brings the believer into a right relationship with God. This means believers died to sin through Jesus' death and was raised with Him to a new life. Salvation is our freedom from the bondage of sin. What's next for new converts? Christian training occurs on how to live godly as believers are new creatures in Christ. After Christian training as new converts in our local church we are to obey the great commission as issued by Christ recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, believers are to bring others to Christ through our "teaching and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Believers must remember as a witness for Christ, we are not alone according to His promise; He is with us through the Holy Spirit; all fears, doubts and apprehensions are removed.

Now that we have concluded this dialogue on salvation and baptism, lets segway to our topical discussion on the covenant as it relates to member's duties to the church. First, we see that members are to walk together in Christian love, for God is love and we are to emulate Christ.

Second, we are to strive for the advancement of the church by promoting its prosperity and spirituality (see Philippians 1:27; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Peter 3:11). How do we advance the church's prosperity? The most familiar is giving of our time, talent and tithes. God requires one tenth according to Malachi 3:10, which

speaks to the blessings in store for believers. The question is often asked, “Will a man rob God” (V8)? Who wants to give all He has done for humanity and everything belongs to Him? In reverencing to God, we give back the first of what He has already given us.

How do we advance the church spiritually? According to 2 Corinthians 7:1 we are to cleanse ourselves of all unholiness and resist sinful desires of the body (paraphrased). Then if we are committed to Christ and have accepted Him as our personal savior, the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, as He cannot reside in a filthy place; subsequently it behooves every believer to lead and live sanctified lives daily. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to aid believers in advancing the church spiritually; the true church is the believer. Let’s discuss briefly advancing the church with our time and talents; time is contributing to a ministry of the church or our community as God has blessed each believer with a gift (talent) and each is to edify the body of Christ. Consider your body; each member (part) of the body serves in its designed function contributing to the entire body. The same principle applies to the church (body of Christ); each gift is given to work together in harmony for the church’s advancement.

Third, we are to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines (Hebrews, 10:25; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Jude 3). Let’s pose a series of questions, what is worship? What are the church ordinances? What is discipline? And finally, what is doctrine? Worship is “reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary P 1065). A series of questions come to mind; when do we worship? Where do we worship? How do we worship? Is it in sincerity or superficially? How often do we worship? Take a self-analysis for your answers. An ordinance is “an authoritative decree or direction” (MwD p. 624). In religious settings and especially the Baptist faith ordinances are recognized as the Baptist Hiscox Guide and or the Articles of Faith. A discipline is defined “as self-control” (MWD p.252). Other denominations have authoritative decrees as a guide for their believers. Speaking on a spiritual note, how believers maintain self-discipline is with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The last question’s answer what is doctrine? Doctrine is teachings. Merriam- Webster (p.262) defines it as “strictly implies authoritative

teaching accepted by a body of believers or adherents of a philosophy or school.” The secular and biblical definitions are parallel in their meanings.

From here we will segway to the fourth duty of the believer to the church, which is to give it pre-eminence in our lives (Matthew 6:33). What this means is to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first and allow Him to take care of our needs.

The fifth duty as a member to the church is to contribute cheerfully and regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8: 6-7). We as believers should make giving a part of our worship being a blessing to others as God has blessed us. Why? Because our true blessings come from God and it is His desire that we follow Christ’s example set before us. He stated that “the poor we would have with us always.” Additionally, our giving should be in proportion to our income, meaning that believers should set aside God’s tenth first each pay as we do our mortgage and experience God’s continuous blessings. Furthermore, we must make a conscious decision to serve God with our time, not just our money (Matthews 6:24). Finally, giving increases our dedication to God (Matthews 6:21) and activate the work of God in our financial affairs (Luke 6:38). More importantly, our primary focus should be God’s righteousness and His kingdom instead of our material wealth. He promised to supply all our needs; He is the good shepherd.

The sixth and final duty as a member of his or her local church is, upon leaving one’s current church, then promptly join another church so the believer will remain active in church work wherever the person may live (see Acts 11:19-21; 18:24-28).

This concludes our discussion on members and church duties; let’s segway to personal Christian living as it relates to believers. The first thing is to maintain family and secret devotions (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Acts 17:11). First, the family structure needs to be recognized as a unit that God instituted, man, wife and children; where man is the head as God is the head of all. The family as a praying unit is a family that recognizes prayer as their communication with God and in the process establishes a relationship with the Father. This represents a godly family because they give thanks to God for what He has done in their lives. Furthermore, the family that places vital importance on family time together and outings as oppose to having the family operates on the postal system syndrome recognizes the true meaning of family.

Second, Christian living take seriously the religious education of their children (2 Timothy 3:15; Deuteronomy 6:4-7) and they do not rely on secular education or the child to learn about God in a hit or miss manner. All parents set an example in their Christian education by living godly lives before the child and then they practice Deuteronomy 6:4-7. In addition, parents enroll their children in a structured Christian educational setting where the true Word of God is being taught. The child's first education begins in the home when the child's learns to talk. The child's biblical teachings progress as the child grows, meaning the child is growing spiritual and physically thus giving the child a solid foundation to withstand Satan's attacks.

Third, our Christian living should be a Bible to the lost world for generations to come. Therefore, we as believers are to seek the salvation of the lost (Acts 1:8; Matthews 4:19; Psalm 126: 5-6; 2:14-15; Proverbs 11:30) in that we are witnesses for Christ; we have power through the Holy Spirit residing in us.

Fourth, we are to walk circumspectly in the world and just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements and exemplary in our behavior (Ephesians 5:15; Philippians 2:115; 1 Peter 2:11-12). What does all this mean? First let's look at the word circumspect(ly) it means to careful consider all circumstances, weigh your options or possible consequences. This what the writer means when she is teaching young children and adults about critical thinking, consider the consequences. Next, we are to be fair in our dealings as God is fair and just with us. To be faithful is to be committed in whatever we promise to do, in other words, let your yes be yes and nos be no's. Finally, be exemplary is to set an example, or serve as a model and lastly be above reproach.

Fifth, Christian living is to avoid gossip and excessive anger (Ephesians 4:31; 1 Peter 2:21; Colossians 3:8; James 3:1-2). We are to speak kindly of others because we are all God's children and we are to emulate Him and then we must love one another. How must we control anger? This is accomplished with meekness, which is anger under control.

The sixth attribute of Christian living is to abstain from the sale or use of liquors (Ephesians 5:18; Habakkuk 2:15). Scripture encourages us to be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of spirits from the vines (fermented wines or intoxicating beverages) to

the point of intoxication. Wine was commonly used in religious (Lord's Supper) setting but it is believed to be of the non fermented or non-toxicating variety.

The seventh and final attribute of Christian living is for believers to be zealous in our efforts for Christ (Titus 2: 14). What does this mean? Believers are to have the zeal of Christ as He is our example in holy living.

Our next and final phase in our covenant discussion is the duty of members to each other; first, we are to watch over one another in love (see I Peter 1:22 paraphrases). Why? God is love and we are to emulate His love. Second, we are to pray for one another (James 5:16). "Prayers of the righteous availeth much." Third, we are to aid in sickness and distress (see Galatians 6:2; James 2:14-17). What better opportunity for a believer to visit than when our brother or sister is experiencing sickness or going through a distressful situation; a smile and prayer is always appropriate? A smile looked upon as the universal language understood by all that warms the heart and believers are encouraged to pray for one another because God answer's prayer. Forth, we are to show sympathy and courtesy (1 Peter 3:8). What this means, we as believers are to share in another's pain and extend a hand of courtesy to the person or family. Lastly, we are to be slow to take offense or become angry and always be ready to reconcile our differences (Ephesians 4:30-32). It takes a big person to say I am sorry. More importantly, this phrase will and has reconciled many differences and initiated more forgiveness than any phrase known to man.

In closing our dialogue on the basic covenant as it relates to believers and the church, it was the writer's intent to enlighten, encourage and refresh the memory of readers on their basic duties. Hopefully, the discussion was stimulating as the covenant was discussed in-depth; for it is our agreement between the church, God and one another. Let's honor our covenant relationships and be blessed.