

OUR MUTUAL COMPACT

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

The first paragraph of the church covenant is like a preface to a book. It contains the basic thesis of the covenant by clearly articulating who qualifies for a local church membership and how one enters into that membership. It introduces the compact that we have with the church and with one another.

There are several scriptural requirements of a candidate for local church membership stipulated in this first paragraph. First, The Prerequisites For Church Membership; second, The Presentation for Membership, and third, The Pledge We Make as Members. Let us examine each section as follows:

I. THE PREREQUISITES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

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

A. The First Prerequisite For Membership Is Salvation.

The first prerequisite, of course, is salvation. The local church membership, to be scripturally correct, must consist only of born-again persons.

1. Salvation is initiated by the Holy Spirit.

“Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God....”

The sinner does not initiate his own salvation. The new birth is the result “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” said Jesus in John 1:13. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” (John 6:63)

The new birth is the impartation of spiritual life to a soul dead in trespasses and sins by the Holy Spirit to the believing sinner who has been brought to the place of repentance and faith as a result of the Holy Spirit’s work.

This work of salvation cannot be accomplished apart from the Holy Spirit. Just as it would be impossible for a soul to pass from death to life without the cross work of Christ, so it is impossible for a soul to pass from death unto life without the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. Salvation requires the reception of Jesus Christ as one's Savior.

“.... to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior....”

“As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:12)

It is my belief that many churches have persons whose names are upon the church membership rolls but who have never been born-again by the Spirit of God. These are they who believe that salvation is the result of joining a church or being baptized, etc. As a result churches that should be leaping ahead are limping along, hindered by unsaved members within the congregation. My message to them is, “make your calling and election sure.” (II Peter 1:10)

B. The Second Prerequisite For Membership Is Baptism.

“..... having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.... “

The Bible basis and background for baptism in water can be seen in 3 short paragraphs of scripture:

1. Matthew 3:13-16,17 – Jesus is our MODEL for baptism

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus was baptized – shouldn’t His followers be baptized?

2. Romans 6:3, 4 contains the MEANING of baptism.

“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Paul was **not** saying that being baptized in water puts us “into Christ” but rather, we who believe were included in what Jesus did when He died upon the cross, was buried and rose again.

Baptism is a silent sermon – the one being baptized is saying, “I believe that when Jesus died, He died for me and in Him I died, I was in Him buried and in His resurrection I arose to a new life. Baptism is an outward picture of an inward experience.

3. Acts 8:36-39 shows the MODE of baptism.

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

Baptism by immersion in water is the scriptural mode of baptism. It is a picture of the Gospel wherein the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is visualized.

No person should be received into membership in the local church who is disobedient. To refuse to submit to water baptism is an act of disobedience. Only born-again, baptized believers should constitute the membership of a New Testament church. Every person who *confesses* Jesus Christ as Savior ought to *profess* Him openly in baptism.

II. THE PRESENTATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

“... we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly enter into covenant....”

The New Testament church is not a secret order. One’s profession of faith and baptism should be seen and heard by witnesses.

A. God Is A Witness - *“... we do now, in the presence of God....”*

The persons who present themselves for membership in the local church should be conscious of the fact that God is listening to their profession of faith and watching their act of commitment. Uniting with the visible Body of Jesus Christ is a most solemn act.

B. Fellow Christians Are Witnesses.

“... in the presence of God, and this assembly enter into covenant....”

On this joyous occasion church members rejoice as they witness additions to the church family. Entering into church membership brings the whole assembly to witness our action. As a result we become accountable to the church for our actions. Consequently, what we do or fail to do affects the entire church.

III. THE PLEDGE WE MAKE AS MEMBERS.

“... 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.”

A. We Solemnly Enter Into This Covenant – *“most solemnly”*

Every candidate for Church membership should agree with the church doctrines, constitution and covenant. To enter into such an agreement is to make a vow. Scriptures are very plain about the seriousness of making vows.

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed - Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” Eccles. 5:4-5)

Deuteronomy 23:23 says, *“That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.”* Whether it is a vow about finances or faith God holds us accountable.

B. We Joyfully Enter Into This Covenant – “and joyfully”

It is a joy to enter into agreement with other brothers and sisters in Christ. To band together with those who have common beliefs, a common purpose, a common hope, common duties and common goals.

C. We Enter Into This Covenant With One Another – “enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.”

When we enter the local fellowship of believers we share the commonalities that all New Testament believers are privileged to enjoy. Therefore, what we do or fail to do impacts the whole body.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.” (I Cor. 12:12)

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (I Cor. 12:26)

Conclusion

Uniting with a scripturally constituted New Testament assembly of believers is a sacred matter and the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, will not hold that person guiltless who takes church membership flippantly and violates their holy vows by profane living which brings reproach upon the Savior and the Christian congregation.

I wish that all members of the church, for which Christ died, would hold the church in as high esteem as did Timothy Dwight, former president of Yale University. He wrote:

“I love Thy church, O God.
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And written on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.”

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