

OUR MUTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

“We engage (pledge) to promote its prosperity and spirituality and 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.”

Vladimir Lenin, author of the philosophy of Leninism, creator of the Soviet Communist Party, leader of the Bolshevik Revolution and founder of the USSR, declared: “We will not accept into our membership anyone unless they are an active, disciplined, working member in one of our organizations.” (State And Revolution 1917 - quoted in Walter Knight Illustrations)

I wonder how churches would fare if they said, ““We will not accept into our membership anyone unless they are willing to be an active, disciplined, working member?” The above paragraph of the Church Covenant has the word “ACTION” stamped all over it. The words, “promote”; “sustain”; “contribute” are action words!

The word "promote" means, "to advance or further." In this context the word "promote" means to advance or further the cause of the church. To promote any cause, especially the church, requires many types of contributions from many members. Every member has something to contribute to the advancement of the church.

“The ministry of the church is a ministry of people. When a church lives, it lives because the people within are vital and active. When a church dies, it withers and dies not because the brick and mortar and carpet and pews get old and begin to crack and rip and crumble. A church withers and dies because the people wither and die.” (Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes)

When does a church prosper? The church in the city of Thessalonica is a good example of a prosperous church. A church is prosperous when:

- 1. It is an energetic church** – “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ....” (I Thess. 1:2,3)
- 2. It is a joyful church** – “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit....” (I Thess. 1:6)
- 3. It is an exemplary church** – “You became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” (I Thess. 1:7)
- 4. It is an evangelistic church** – “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.” (I Thess. 1:8)

With that brief model before us, let us focus upon the contributions mentioned in the paragraph of the Church Covenant under consideration:

I. WE PLEDGE TO PROMOTE THE CHURCH

"We engage (pledge) to promote its prosperity and spirituality...."

A. To Promote its Prosperity.

The reference here is to the general welfare of the church, its purpose, policies, programs. It means to have concern for the church's progress and be involved in its perpetuation.

B. To Promote its Spirituality.

Prosperity and spirituality, in the context in which the terms are used in the Covenant, mean two entirely different things. Material prosperity does not always mean that the church is spiritually prosperous. To the financially prosperous church in the city of Laodicea He said, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:14-17)

What is spirituality? Spirituality is that which relates to or affects the spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical. It is the quality of being eternity focused rather than earthly focused. In Philippians 3:19 Paul refers to those "who mind earthly things." That is, they are entirely focused upon things of this life with little or no regard for things in life hereafter.

Colossians chapter 3 states it as follows: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." (vs.1-2)

The spiritual person is one who is prepared to recognize and properly appreciate spiritual realities. Spiritual progress is measured by purity, unity, harmony and maturity among other spiritual characteristics. The individual church member who subscribes to the Church Covenant is pledging to promote the spiritual health of the church.

II. WE PLEDGE TO SUSTAIN THE CHURCH

"We engage (pledge) to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines...."

To "sustain" means: "To give support to; to provide for the support of; to maintain or cause to continue; to keep up; to support the weight of; to hold up; to keep from sinking or giving away." (Webster's Dictionary)

A. To Sustain The Church's Worship.

Worship is both a private and a public exercise. The Covenant is speaking of public worship. Repeatedly the Bible emphasizes corporate worship. For example, united worship is encouraged in the following Psalms:

Psalm 111:1 – "Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart, In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation."

Psalm 107:32 – “Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the company of the elders.”

Psalm 68:26 – “Bless God in the congregations.”

Psalm 26:12 – “In the congregations I will bless the LORD.”

Psalm 22:22 – “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”

How do we sustain the worship services of the church?

1. Be present in the worship services.
2. Participate in the worship services by singing, reverently listening, meditating, giving.
3. Pray for the worship services.
4. Invite others to attend the worship services of the church with you.

Some have said, “I don’t get anything out of church services.” Perhaps it’s because they do not put anything into it! True faith never returns home with an empty bucket.

B. To Sustain The Church’s Ordinances.

What are the ordinances?

1. Baptism.

How do I sustain the ordinance of Baptism?

- a. By insisting upon its scriptural mode which is immersion in water only after one experiences the new birth. (Acts 8:37)
- b. By urging persons who have been saved to follow the Lord in believer’s baptism.
- c. By being present for baptismal services.

2. The Lord’s Supper.

How do I sustain the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper?

- a. By being present for the Lord’s Supper observance.
- b. By preparation preceding participation. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (I Cor. 11:28)
- c. By reverently observing it. “This do in remembrance of me” said the Lord Jesus. (Luke 22:19)
- d. By living afterward in a manner worthy of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

C. To Sustain The Church’s Discipline.

The Bible teaches by precept and example that discipline should be exercised. Among the passages is I Corinthians 5:1-7 and 11-13. Here is exhortation and example. One of the most neglected practices in the modern church is the avoidance of exercising discipline of erring members.

The neglect of church discipline is in line with the general trend in society in general. The lack of adequate discipline in homes, schools, governments and churches can certainly be blamed as a major factor in the lawlessness and delinquency that we see on every hand in our land. Softness properly describes the average attitude regarding discipline. Too often personal feelings enter in the situation and discipline is avoided.

J. Oswald Sanders, writing in his book *Spiritual Leadership* says, "In any church or religious society there is the necessity to maintain godly and loving discipline if divine standards are to be maintained, especially in matters of soundness of faith, morals, and Christian conduct." He gives us five helpful guidelines regarding disciplinary action:

1. "Such action should be taken only after the most thorough and impartial inquiry.
2. It should be undertaken only when it would be for the overall good of the work and the individual.
3. It should always be in a spirit of genuine love, and conducted in the most considerate manner.
4. It should always be with the spiritual help and restoration of the offender in view.
5. It should be done only with much prayer."

G. Campbell Morgan writes in the Corinthian letters of Paul about the evident loss of discipline in the contemporary church which weakens the church's testimony. He says, "The history of the church shows that the church pure is the church powerful; and the church patronized and tolerant toward evil is the church puerile and paralyze. We must ever be careful that our discipline is in the spirit of Christ."

Matthew Henry, in commenting on 2 Corinthians 2, notes that the necessary actions of church discipline "are a grief to tender - spirited ministers, and are administered with regret." Yet, he says, "Even in reproofs, admonitions, and acts of discipline, faithful ministers show their love."

How can I help sustain the discipline of the church?

1. By living "soberly, righteously ungodly in this present world" (Titus 2:12)) and encouraging my fellow believers to do the same.
2. By rebuking them in love when they sin. "Exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13) Also, Jesus' instructions regarding dealing with an offending member – Matt. 18:15-20.
3. By standing firmly behind my church and pastor when disciplinary action is taken.

D. To Sustain The Church's Doctrines.

Doctrine is important; doctrine means teaching. The teachings of the church should be based entirely upon the written Word of God. To Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote:

- "Till I come giving heed to doctrine." (I Timothy 4:13)
- "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine." (I Timothy 4:16)

How do I sustain the doctrines of the church?

1. Learn them - know them in your head.
2. Believe them – stow them in your heart.
3. Practice them – show them in your life.

Follow the example of the first church in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 2:42 “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

III. WE PLEDGE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHURCH

“We engage (pledge) 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.”

A. What Members Pledge To Do - *“We engage (pledge) to contribute cheerfully and regularly.....”*

Those who are half-heartedly committed to the church usually feel squemish when the subject of giving financially to the church is mentioned, as if contributing money to the ministry of the church is an idea that was originated by the church hierarchy. However, this is God’s idea. Many members are ignorant of what the Bible teaches about our responsibility to use our resources for God’s work in the world.

First and foremost, God wants us to give because it shows that we recognize he is truly the Lord of our lives. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

Everything we own, everything we have comes from God. So when we give, we simply offer him a very small portion of all the abundance he has already given to us. Giving is an expression of our thankfulness and praise to God! It comes from a heart of worship. For everything we give already belongs to him!

1. Believers should give according to their income.

“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Note that the offering was set aside on the first day of the week. When we are willing to offer the first portion of our wealth back to him, then God knows he has our hearts. He knows and we also know, that we are submitted completely in trust and obedience to our Lord and Savior.

2. We are blessed when we give.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35)

God wants us to give because he knows how blessed we will be as we give generously to

him and to others. Giving is a divine principle - it brings more blessing to the giver than to the recipient.

3. When we give freely to God, we receive freely from God.

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

4. Believers should give cheerfully.

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

B. What Members Pledge To Support – “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.”

1. *“the support of the ministry.....”*

What does the Bible say about the support of the Ministry? The reference here is to the support of those who are ministering to the flock. The pastor should be paid by the flock. (1 Cor. 9:7-14)

2. *“the expenses of the church....”*

To often it is "our" church when there are no bills to pay and everything is running smoothly and "their" church when things go wrong and bills pile up. A church that is growing will have expenses as will a growing family. Such expenses become the responsibility of all who are members of the church. There are two ways of meeting the expenses of the church:

a. By man's way - bake sales, pie suppers, car washes, carnivals, bingo, etc.

b. By God's way – 1 Cor. 16:2 “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him....” There are three principles set forth in this short sentence:

- A definite period – “Upon the first day of the week”
- A definite person – “every one of you”
- A definite proportion – “as God has prospered”

3. *“the relief of the poor....”*

Most churches, that I am acquainted with, have a Benevolent Ministry. It has been the practice in churches that I have been privileged to pastor, to have a Benevolent Offering each time the Lord's Supper is celebrated and then the Deacons or Elders distribute the funds to those who are in need. Some churches have a “Clothing Closet” and/or a “Food Cupboard” to assist those in need.

4. *“and the spread of the gospel through all nations.”*

How can I contribute to the spreading of the gospel?

- a. By financially supporting the missionary ministry of the church;
- b. By praying for the missionaries that the church supports;
- c. By corresponding with the individual missionaries;
- d. By going as a missionary!

Conclusion

God wants believers to be free from the love of money, which the Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:10 is "a root of all kinds of evil." By our giving we honor the Lord, and promote His work in the world.

There are "givers" and there are "takers." God is a "Giver." Let us model ourselves after our Heavenly Father from Whom every "good and perfect gift" comes! (James 1:17)

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