

OUR MUTUAL CONDUCT

“..... to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.”

What is a church?

The word "church" comes from the Greek "ekklesia" which means "gathering" or "assembly." Therefore, the local church is the gathering of the believers who come together to participate in fellowship with one another as they worship God and hear from His Word, the Bible. The purpose of the church is to both glorify God and to evangelize the world by the spreading of the Good News about Jesus Christ which is the Gospel.

Conduct impacts the church. Our beliefs are reflected in our behavior. When we declare for Christ people both within and without the church expect to see a change in our lives. Persons who say they have made a confession of faith yet whose conduct is unchanged are a blight upon the Church of Jesus Christ. The worst advertisements for the cause of Christ are counterfeit Christians. This paragraph of the Church Covenant addresses some very practical matters which conscientious Christians will welcome.

This paragraph of the Church Covenant is about walking *"circumspectly in the world."* In the previous paragraphs of the covenant largely internal matters have been addressed. Now the covenant deals with some externals. The phrase, *"to walk circumspectly in the world"* introduces the subject matter and the remainder of the paragraph.

"To walk circumspectly in the world" is a direct quotation from Ephesians 5:15 which states, "see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." The word "walk" refers to one's conduct. In other words, we are to conduct ourselves in a circumspect manner." The word "circumspect" means: "discreet, upright, diligent, accurate, careful." Romans 13:13 says, "let us walk honestly." That is what walking circumspectly means.

Notice what we are to do: "walk." How are we to walk? "Circumspectly." Where are we to walk? "In the world." The Christian is a citizen of two worlds. He Ephesians 1:21 speaks of "this world" and also of that world "which is to come." The point is this: we are to demonstrate by our conduct in this world that we are citizens of a far better world. Right here is where the matter of our conduct comes into full focus.

Please notice that the remainder of this paragraph in our Church Covenant logically falls into two divisions, both of which elaborate on the matter and manner of Christian conduct. The first division deals with **High Public Business Standards** and the second division deals with **High Personal Behavioral Standards**.

HIGH PUBLIC BUSINESS STANDARDS

“..... to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment....”

Christians ought to set holy standards of conduct both inside and outside the church. We should set a high standard in:

A. Our Dealings – “*just in our dealings*”

Justified people ought to be just in their dealings! We ought to be just in our dealings with:

1. The world because we represent Christ.

"Provides angst honest in the sight of all men." (Romans 12:17)

2. Our fellow believers because of our relationship.

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10)

3. God, because of our responsibility.

"We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ..." (2 Cor. 5:10)

In all of our appointments, obligations and dealings with others we must be above board, fair and honest because we are children of the most holy God!

B. Our Duties – “*faithful in our engagements*”

"Engagements" refers to our duties. Christians ought to be punctual, dependable, responsible and faithful in every area of their lives.

1. I Cor. 4:2 - "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

2. Romans 12:11 – "Be not slothful in business (but be) fervent in spirit serving the Lord."

3. Proverbs 22:29 – "Do you see a man *who* excels in his work? He will stand before kings"

As a pastor of churches and a president of Christian educational institutions, I have had companies contact me and ask for names of Christians whom they could consider for employment because, they said, "We want employees who we can trust."

C. Our Deportment – “*exemplary in our deportment....*”

"Deportment" means ones conduct and behavior. Christians ought to be exemplary -- that is an example.

I Timothy 4:12 says, "Be an example of the believers, in word, in conduct, and love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

The New Testament apostles light shined brightly in dark cultures because they were exemplary. Ephesus was notorious for its moral looseness; Corinth seethed with vice and Rome was riddled with perversions, yet in these cultures Christianity took root and grew not only because of the life-changing message preached but that changed the lives displayed by the messengers.

We live in a dark world -- vice, vileness and violence rule. However, when virtue is injected in

this type of setting, people take notice! We need a revival of holiness in our dealings duties and deportment!

HIGH PERSONAL BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS

“... to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.”

While it is true that we “are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14), it is also true that we are not outlaws either! While “under grace” we are not to live disgracefully! That to which we pledge ourselves in the Church covenant is to be reflective not restrictive. We are to reflect that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus.

A. There Is The Matter Of The Tongue. *“.... to avoid all tattling, backbiting....”*

The tongue, being in a wet place, is always in danger of slipping! We would all do well to pray with Job, “teach me and I will hold my tongue.” (Job 6:24)

Remember, keep your words sweet -- you never know when you might have to eat them! Here is some mighty good advice given to us by an unknown writer:

"if your lips would keep from slips,
Five things observed with care:
Of whom you speak,
To whom you speak
And how and when and where."

Someone else gives us this bit of advice:

"A wise old owl sat in an oak;
The more he saw, the less he spoke;
The less he spoke, the more he heard;
Let's try to imitate that old bird!"

B. There Is The Matter Of The Temper. *“....and excessive anger....”*

“There are two kinds of anger, carnal and holy. An example of the former is found in Cain when he murdered his brother. There are various examples of the latter even in the life of Jesus: Our Lord's anger was not only not sinful, but it was holy indignation, a perfectly right state of heart.

Anger is not evil *per se*. If anger were in itself sinful, how could God Himself be angry? How could He, who was separate from sin and sinners, have looked round upon men with anger? (Mark 3:5) The only time it is not a sin to get angry is when one gets angry at sin!

Matthew Henry commented: “If ye have a just occasion to be angry at any, time, see that it be without sin: and therefore take heed of excess in your anger. If we would be angry, and sin not, we must be angry at nothing but sin: and we, should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of

our own. One great and common sin in anger is to suffer it to burn into wrath, and then to let it rest. Though anger in itself is not sinful, yet there is the utmost danger of its becoming so, if it be not carefully watched, and speedily suppressed" (comment on Eph. 4:26).

Proverbs 16:32 – "*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*"

Ephesians 4:26, 27 – "*Be angry, and do not sin*": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil." In other words, "Simmer down before sunset!

A lady confessed to Evangelist Billy Sunday saying, "Yes, I have a bad temper but it is always over in a minute." To which Billy Sunday replied, "So is a shotgun blast, but look at the damage it can do in only a split second!" Temper makes a person speak their mind when they should be minding their speech!

C. There Is The Matter of Thirst. "*....to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage....*"

(Revised wording in some churches: "To abstain from all forms of activity which dishonor our Lord Jesus Christ, cause stumbling to a fellow believer or hinder the winning of a soul to Christ; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the cause of Christ, our Savior; and to give Him preeminence in all things.")

Think soberly and scripturally about 3 reasons why a Christian should not be a social drinker of alcohol:

1. Because of the Christian's Temple.

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body^[c] and in your spirit, which are God's." (I Cor. 6:19, 20)

Alcoholic beverages, among other things that one can take into the body, can degrade and degenerate the human body. Social drinking is the cause of one of the greatest health problems in the world today. Drinking alcohol disposes the drinker to heart disease, cirrhosis of the liver and emotional damages.

Proverbs 29:29-32 is the best warning that I can give:

"Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.

Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper.”

2. Because of The Christian’s Treasure.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), they report that alcohol consumption in America alone costs from \$75 billion to \$100 billion per year. How much of that is money Christians spend on alcohol is not known. Believers are to spend their money wisely and in a manner that will bring eternal rewards, not regrets.

3. Because of The Christian’s Testimony.

Paul wrote, “Abstain from all appearances of evil.” (I Thess. 5:22) A proper Christian testimony demands total abstinence from social drinking. Even serving alcohol is not consistent with a true Christian testimony. The Bible condemns the server as well as the sipper - “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor....” (Hab. 2:15) Holiness and highballs are not harmonious!

More than 400 years ago the great reformer John Calvin voiced concern about Christian living before a watching world. He wrote, “Everything bad the ungodly can seize hold of in our life is twisted maliciously against Christ and his teachings. The result is that by our full God’s sacred name is exposed to insult.” (Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, vol.10)

Jerry Bridges writes, “Our work, our play, our driving, our shopping should all be done with a view that not only will and believers have nothing bad to say, but on the contrary, they will be attracted to the gospel that they see at work in our lives.” (The Discipline of Grace, Navpress)

Notice the last phrase of the paragraph that we have been examining: *“to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.”* If the Christian’s standard of behavior is what it ought to be, unbelievers will be attracted to Christ and His church and thereby His cause will be advanced in the world.

Conclusion

Five times in the book of Leviticus God says to His people, “Be holy as I am holy.” This command is echoed in the New Testament also. I Peter 1:15 says, “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

The Christian’s conduct reflects negatively or positively upon the church of the Lord Jesus. The greatest hindrance to the progress of the church is not outside the church but inside the church – those who profess faith in Christ but live fleshly lives. One enemy inside the camp is more damaging than one-hundred outside the camp.

Illustration: The story is told of a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great who was brought before the Great Conqueror for a crime he had committed. The Emperor listened to the charges and the evidence against the soldier and then turned to him and asked, “What is your name?”

The soldier replied, "Alexander." Again, the Emperor asked, "What is your real name?" And the second time the soldier answered, "Alexander." With great emphasis, the Emperor demanded, "Either change your conduct or change your name, for no man can bear my name and continue to live as you do!"

“Let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”
(2 Timothy 2:19)

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