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DEVELOPING A COVENANT VIEW OF MEMBERSHIP
AT WESTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH,
CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE.

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING A COVENANT VIEW OF MEMBERSHIP

AT WESTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH,

CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

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To Cheryl,
my love and helper
for all of life and ministry.

To our daughter and our sons,
Sarah, Chad, Chase, and Christian.

To our daughters-in-law and in-love,
Kaley, Courtney, and Hannah.

To our grandchildren,
Adelai, Alaina, Walter, and Rustin,
our greatest joy on this earth.

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PREFACE

This project was made possible because of the support, prayers, and encouragement from several people. First, I want to thank my wife, Cheryl, who has been my co-laborer in life and ministry. Her faithful support has been a strength and encouragement. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). I am, therefore, abundantly blessed and highly favored.

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Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. I especially want to thank my church family at Westwood Baptist Church for their patient commitment to follow my leadership during very uncertain times and for the love that they have been willing to share. I cannot describe enough how wonderful it is to serve alongside the ministry staff of this great church. They have truly been the strength behind the success of this project.

Fourth, I am particularly grateful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of which I am a proud alumnus in both graduate and post-graduate study. I am honored to have studied there during the tenure of such exceptional academic leadership as has been provided by its president, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., and by Dr. Adam W. Greenway, Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Ministry.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to three men who have made the greatest impact on my life. Each of these has influenced me in specific areas of life. It seems that not a day goes by that I do not wonder how each would respond in a given situation. Walt Smartt, John Strickland, and Rev. Bob Bell have been giants among great men. These men continue to be my mentors even though each now knows the glories of heaven. Words cannot express how I long for just one more conversation with each of them. I joyfully remain in their debt.

Steven Harold Smartt

Cleveland, Tennessee

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a covenant view of membership among the congregants at Westwood Baptist Church in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Goals

The first goal of this project was to assess the current understanding of membership expectations among actively attending members of the congregation. This goal was measured by administering a *Membership Assessment Survey* to a cross-section of actively attending members at the beginning of the project,¹ which was administered again at the conclusion of the project to determine progress. This survey provided an assessment of the participants' views on the biblical expectations of members who were assembled under both the existing and previous church covenants.² This goal was deemed successfully met once thirty of those who agreed to participate completed the survey.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical elements and covenant expectations for church membership. This goal was measured by a rubric used by the pastors to evaluate the content of this material and its

¹See appendix 1 for an example of the survey used.

²See appendices 2 and 3 respectively for the existing and previous church covenants.

relationship to the church covenant.³ This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above levels.

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of the congregation related to membership expectations by preaching the eight-week sermon series on the biblical elements and covenant expectations for church membership. This goal was measured by a post-series administration of the first survey to the original survey participants.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive variance between the pre-series and post-series results.

The fourth goal of this project was to develop a teaching guide for use in ongoing membership information classes. This goal was measured by a rubric used by the pastors to evaluate the material.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above levels.

Ministry Context

Westwood Baptist Church in Cleveland, Tennessee, was in need of a biblically directed view of covenant membership for the local church. Although the church had benefited from long tenured pastoral leadership in its early development and an outline of clear statements on covenant membership in the church documents, the church struggled through a recent season of decline brought on by dramatic shifts in leadership and ministry emphasis. The aftermath of these changes led to pervasive failure in fulfilling

³See appendix 6 for the evaluation rubric used.

⁴See appendix 1.

⁵See appendix 6.

membership expectations by a large portion of the membership body. The weakened commitment among the membership developed over time and was exacerbated by insufficient member care, a lack of attention to discipleship, and by the church's method for receiving members. In addition, changes in pastoral leadership and the instability of its infrastructure brought on by these changes have further contributed to the current state of uncertainty among the church's membership.

Much of Westwood's early development as a church was focused on numerical growth through means of evangelism and special events designed to draw the surrounding community into the church. This was accomplished with weekly neighborhood visitation, seasonal revivals with special guests, and large holiday events. While the intended goals of numerical growth were pursued, the expectations of membership were rarely addressed beyond the need for faithful attendance and generous stewardship. Consequently, membership expectations were seldom defined from a biblical imperative and rarely presented as covenant commitment. Much of the teaching and proclamation given to the church has been evangelistic, presented so as to seek an immediate response but without addressing the ongoing essentials of Christian discipleship. Follow-up and member care was left primarily to the Sunday School classes and small group ministries, but this was delegated without clear definitions or objectives and with little provision made for pastoral oversight or congregational accountability. The church documents were not followed correctly and the church covenant was ignored. As a result, membership advanced in number but its significance among those who held it declined in its regard.

The most obvious period of membership indifference seems to have emerged during the past decade following a change in pastoral ministry as the congregation struggled to identify with and follow their new pastor's leadership. This shift resulted in a gradually increasing tension that brought the eventual loss of over half the membership attendance, set off a chain reaction of hurt, confusion, and bitterness, culminating in the pastor's resignation under duress. Two primary consequences developed during this tumultuous decade that have contributed to this indifference toward biblical church membership: a failure to acknowledge membership obligations and processes as outlined in the church documents, and the loss of a sense of community and belonging due to negligence in defining membership in the covenantal context.

Although the church has stabilized over the past six years, a thorough explanation of the expectations of church membership is an ongoing endeavor. Progress has been made in reintroducing and updating the church documents to the membership. On March 30, 2014, the membership body accepted by vote with only one abstention to adopt a new constitution and by-laws which included the acceptance and affirmation of a new church covenant. While much still remains to be accomplished in advancing the congregation's understanding of membership as a meaningful component of Christian discipleship and corporate worship, it is under these new documents that the progress of this project was intended.

Rationale for the Project

Past practices and goals of the church have not been inclined toward a culture and expectation of church membership that is influenced by covenant commitment. Consequently, the church developed a weakened infrastructure that would not sustain its

membership size with a healthy posture. Therefore, attention was needed for the congregation's attitude toward membership in the local church so that effective member care and gospel involvement for all would be encouraged. A reintroduction of the biblical views that address the issues of church membership as outlined in the church covenant was vital.

The process toward biblical church membership would be advanced by leading the church in understanding the expectations for members as outlined in the church documents and church covenant. The issue of membership expectations at Westwood Baptist Church had been clearly outlined in the church covenant, and each statement was in accord with scriptural purposes. Consequently, the church needed reminding of the church covenant's content and its significance for the ongoing vitality of the membership body.

A systematic method of topical/textual sermon presentation was developed and delivered in order to address the key elements of membership expectations. The outline of the church covenant was followed for this and the nature of its obligating implications was presented within the context of this specific church family. The appropriate venue to present this series was times of corporate worship gathering when the whole membership body was assembled together to hear the proclamation of God's Word. Moreover, this series was integrated into the required curriculum for new member orientation.

This project defined the way in which the members of the congregation were to participate in church membership so that each member could recognize and share certain biblical privileges and responsibilities. By focusing on the recently ratified church covenant as a standard for church membership, members more readily accepted their

responsibilities to each other as an obligation of their commitment. As they have come to understand the tenets of the church covenant with supporting biblical texts through sermon presentation and ongoing instruction for new members, the significance of covenant relationship has become a cherished paradigm for the membership community of Westwood Baptist Church.

Definitions, Limitations and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Biblical church membership. Mark Dever defines biblical church membership as meaningful membership with four criteria: a credible profession of faith in Christ, regular attendance and participation in the life and activities of the church, primary attention given to participation in the church of membership, where certain biblical privileges and responsibilities are shared among all members.⁶

Church covenant. A church covenant is “a statement of relationships and expectations of members.”⁷

Intentional discipleship. This term refers to an approach within the church that facilitates an expectation of membership that includes a commitment to “the lifelong process of intellectual, spiritual, and behavioral transformation through biblical instruction and relationship.”⁸

⁶Mark Dever, “What Is ‘Meaningful Membership?’” 9Marks, last modified 2016, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://9marks.org/answer/what-meaningful-membership/>.

⁷William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 165.

⁸Regis Nicoll, “Intentional Discipleship,” Breakpoint, last modified 2016, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/breakpoint-columns/entry/2/17307>.

Member care. This term refers to the comprehensive attention given to members of the church intended to encourage individual spiritual growth in the context of corporate participation.⁹

Membership information class/new member orientation. These terms refer to a forum in which an established curriculum is followed in order to provide an introduction to a specific congregation's beliefs and polity.¹⁰

The single limitation of this project was the fifteen-week duration of the project. Every issue could not be covered, and neither could all relevant sermons be preached on the subject, within the determined time frame. Therefore, the project was limited by the number of sermons that could be delivered.

Three delimitations applied to this project. One delimitation of this project was the eight topics covered in the sermon series. The number of topics covered in the church covenant was used to determine the number of topics presented. Another delimitation was the commitment required of those being surveyed to attend each of the eight-week sermon presentations. A third delimitation of this project was to limit the minimum selection of those surveyed to at least thirty current, active members of Westwood Baptist Church who agreed to attend Sunday morning weekly worship each week throughout the eight-week duration of the sermon series.

⁹John MacArthur, "Church Membership," Grace to You, last modified 2016, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.gty.org/resources/distinctives/dd03/church-membership>.

¹⁰Chuck Lawless has written extensively on this issue and provides more information on the value of these classes and an explanation of proposed structures and processes to create such a class. Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

Project Methodology

The goals of this project were intended to produce both immediate and future benefits that would lead toward a biblical understanding of church membership and expectations of members at Westwood Baptist Church. The immediate intention was to persuade the current membership toward a greater understanding of the biblical principles of covenant membership and their concurrence with the church documents. The ongoing objective was to establish this understanding at the beginning of each new member's relationship to the congregation by integrating this information into the membership information class.

During the course of the project, participation among those being surveyed was dependent upon weekly worship attendance. In the event of unforeseen circumstances, it was expected that some participants may not receive instruction in all subject areas of the church covenant due to an unavoidable absence. In order to maintain congruence for as many as possible, it was required that a comprehensive approach of instruction be maintained throughout its presentation.

The first goal of this project was to assess the current understanding of membership expectations among actively attending members of the congregation. A pre-project questionnaire¹¹ was distributed the week prior to the first morning worship service of the project series and collected on the following Sunday. Likewise, a post-project questionnaire was distributed and collected at the series conclusion in a similar manner. The purpose of the first questionnaire was to ascertain the congregation's understanding of covenant membership and to establish a benchmark for comparative progress to their

¹¹See appendix 1.

responses in the second questionnaire. Once an evaluation was made showing disparities and similarities between the expectations identified in the church covenant and those held by a cross-section of the membership as revealed in the survey, presentation of the pertinent biblical truths was made with greater application. This goal was calculated by the responses provided by individual respondents to the survey and measured as a collective whole. This goal was deemed successfully met once thirty of those asked to participate completed the survey.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical elements and covenant expectations for church membership. These expectations were drawn from eight categories of significance summarized from the church covenant: Unified affections, brotherly love, congregational worship, biblical discipleship, harmonious relationships, genuine witness, cooperative generosity, and unceasing faithfulness. This goal was measured by a rubric used by two associate pastors presently serving the pastoral ministry of Westwood Baptist Church to evaluate the content of this material and its relationship to the church covenant.¹² Identifying the scriptural basis for each of the aforementioned expectations from the church covenant gave biblical support to the definition of each requirement and legitimacy to each member's obligation. The texts for each of these thematic categories were selected topically with appropriate acknowledgment of the context of the passage. This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the "sufficient" or above levels.

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of the congregation related to membership expectations by preaching the eight-week sermon

¹² See appendix 6.

series on the biblical elements and covenant expectations for church membership. This goal was measured by a post-series administration of the first survey to the original survey participants.¹³ It was necessary to preach these eight sermons individually in successive order while providing a comprehensive learning approach. This further ensured a thorough coverage of the topics. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference between the pre-series and post-series results.

The fourth goal of this project was to develop a teaching guide for use in ongoing membership information classes. This goal was measured by a rubric used by two associate pastors presently serving the pastoral ministry of Westwood Baptist Church to evaluate the material.¹⁴ Creating a teaching guide and integrating this into the ongoing membership information classes has facilitated an ongoing implementation of this project for sustainable application. Each of the aforementioned thematic categories of the church covenant can be explained in the context of the biblical exegesis provided in the sermon series. These main points were condensed into a teaching guide and distributed during session four of the four-week membership information class. This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above levels.

Conclusion

This project was designed to develop a biblical understanding of membership expectations that would be built upon relationship and secured by covenant. Its goals

¹³See appendix 1.

¹⁴See appendix 6.

were intended to influence the culture of Westwood Baptist Church toward a greater commitment to the kingdom and to each other through covenant relationship. The ultimate hope for this project was that the congregation of this church would rediscover its part in fulfilling the Great Commission as they honor the Great Commandment and await Christ's return – together.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT
FOR COVENANT MEMBERSHIP IN
THE LOCAL CHURCH

The Bible and Christian theology address the subject of covenant relationship for membership in the local church by acknowledging the unique relationship of covenant that God has established with his people throughout Scripture. God designed covenant relationships according to the pattern he employs in leading, protecting, disciplining, and equipping his elect people. The history of God’s covenant relationship with humanity reveals a design for accountability, holiness, leadership, and community. Because God has chosen this relational paradigm for his association with humanity, the church should embrace it as a legitimate pattern for relationships within the local church.¹

**The History of Covenant between
God and Humanity**

Each covenant ratified between God and humanity has been offered in grace by the one who is able to the ones who were unable and was constructed upon conditions that would grant the promises of its provision. Typically, these covenants were given as a corrective measure in response to humanity’s helpless condition. Such a resolve would

¹Dan Horn writes in his online blog, “Since God has shown us a pattern of covenanting together, it is a valid pattern for the church. A public statement of affirmation of the covenant, makes it clear that everyone is obligated by the terms of the covenant, both the church and the member.” Dan Horn, “Reforming to Scripture: What the Bible Says about Church Membership,” *Reformingtoscripture.com*, last modified 2016, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://reformingtoscripture.com/resources/articles/theology/what-the-bible-says-about-church-membership/>.

be the case in the covenants that would follow. The first covenant ratified between God and humanity, however, was not given under these terms.

The Edenic and Adamic Covenants

The first covenant, the Edenic Covenant,² was initiated by God as a declarative summary of humanity's obligation to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28).³ Nevertheless, though not instituted as a corrective response, this covenant was applied and formalized under the structure of conditions that would serve as boundaries for the blessings granted.

The Edenic Covenant, being offered in grace and granting universal provision for all, was conditional upon the obedience of humankind but was annulled upon their act of disobedience. God commanded Adam in Genesis 2:16-17, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Because humankind refused these conditions, God no longer obligated himself to the provisions of this covenant. The unconditional provisions of the subsequent covenant that was offered as a corrective measure replaced the conditional nature of the Edenic Covenant. This ensuing covenant, the Adamic Covenant, is another covenant of grace that declared judgment for people's

²Many scholars, including Harold L. Willmington, founder and dean of Willmington School of the Bible at Liberty University and of Liberty Home Bible Institute in Lynchburg, Virginia, identify the Edenic Covenant as the first part of the Adamic Covenant. Willmington and others list the Edenic Covenant as the conditional covenant that was given before the fall and was replaced the unconditional covenant given after the fall. In his summary, both covenants are inclusive as one. H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Book of Bible Lists* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1987).

³Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

sin but pronounced forgiveness through God's unconditional provision.⁴ The provisions of the Adamic Covenant were granted unconditionally by God to offer redemption to those who had fallen prey to betraying the first covenant and to their progeny.⁵ The remaining covenants⁶ followed the unconditional pattern of the Adamic Covenant with the exception of the Mosaic Covenant given to the Hebrews at Sinai.⁷

The Mosaic Covenant

A covenant that is secured by conditional adherence, such as the Mosaic Covenant, requires all participating parties to fulfill certain requisites in order to receive full and continued benefit. The consequences of noncompliance could result in reducing the provisions of the original agreement, or in nullifying the covenant altogether, as in the case of the Edenic Covenant. An explanation of this type of unique arrangement presented by God to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 19:5-6 follows:

This proposal made by God (My covenant) would give Israel an exalted position among the nations in view of their acceptance of God's righteous standards.

⁴The text of the Adamic Covenant is given in Gen 3:15-19.

⁵The New Testament reference to this provision is seen in Titus 1:1-2 and Heb 13:20.

⁶In addition to the Edenic Covenant and the Adamic Covenant, many scholars identify five other covenants in Scripture: The Noahic Covenant (Gen 9:16); The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:2); The Mosaic Covenant (Exod 19:5); The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:16); The New Covenant (prophesied of by Jeremiah in Jer 31:31-34 and further clarified in Heb 8:8). Paul S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 35.

⁷Some scholars have included an eighth covenant, the Palestinian Covenant. Woolvard and Zuck write, "Deuteronomy 29:1. Some see this verse as an introduction to the fourth address of Moses beginning in verse 2, but probably it concludes the covenant renewal ceremony in Moab. This preference is reflected in the Hebrew text which numbers this verse as 28:69 rather than 29:1. The words, the covenant . . . in Moab, in addition to the covenant He had made with them at Horeb, have led some to posit the existence of a separate covenant (i.e., a Palestinian Covenant) in addition to the Mosaic Covenant. The wording, however, was not meant to reflect the making of a new covenant, but the renewing of the Mosaic Covenant made at Horeb. Moses' fourth address introduces no new covenantal provisions that were not already made explicit in his other speeches. So Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20 recapitulates the covenant details laid down in the preceding chapters." John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 314.

If they accepted and obeyed the covenant stipulations, God promised to make them His treasured possession (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Malachi 3:17). They would be His own people, highly valued by and related to Him. Also they would become a kingdom of priests, that is, each member of the nation with God as his King would know and have access to Him and mediate on behalf of each other as did priests. Also they would be a holy nation, a nation morally pure and dedicated entirely to the service of God. God redeemed Israel so that she might be in touch with and separated to Him.⁸

In light of Israel's covenant with God they were offered three very distinct privileges: an exalted relationship with God, the unique position of exalted favor among the nations and exceptional provision that would guarantee their success and prosperity. The only condition that was placed upon them was obedience. Their obedience was not subject to their own determinations, however, nor was it relative to their circumstances whether constant or changing. The obedience that was required of them for full participation, and the advantages that would follow, was absolute adherence to certain and particular standards as specified in the Mosaic Law. Thus, with the ratification of this covenant, a specific expectation of their role in a binding relationship was reintroduced. Israel would continue to benefit under the unconditional qualifications of the preceding covenants, already ratified and continuing in application, but the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant would only be extended according to their absolute compliance.

The historical activity of God granting favor to people that would otherwise be distanced from him is a testimony to his grace that is unceasing and to the magnificence of his glorious wisdom. The enduring compassion required in the provision of his deliberate grace through covenantal relationship gives witness to his faithfulness and calls attention to his attributes that make him worthy of the honor he requires. The history of covenant between God and man reveals God's continued provision that is

⁸ Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 138.

granted to the people of his election in order to fulfill his divine purpose. The covenants that came after the Noachic Covenant were given to a specific people among humanity, the people of Israel, so that God's relationship to them would be a witness to all of his divine glory. Each covenant is a continuation of the previous and is either fulfilled by the next or remains in continued implementation.

The Principle of Covenant between God and Humanity

The intended outcome of the covenants is the greater purpose of God's grace being extended so as to exalt himself among all of his creation. Thus, the purpose of his deliberate grace extended through covenant relationship was to reveal himself and his glory.

The Presumption of Holiness in the Mosaic Covenant

The consequential obedience of Israel to the specified conditions of the covenants would testify of God's great name as the benefactor to all who would observe Israel's assent to his demands. This display was clearly God's ultimate intention for the outcome, and he conveyed this intent to the people of Israel through his prophets. In the exhortation given to the people of Israel in preparation for entering the Promised Land, Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:5-6:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."⁹

⁹David Williams observes, "Israel was to portray God's holiness to the nations around them. They were commanded to separate themselves from the heathen nations and not to worship their gods (Exod 9:13-16; 34:10-16; Deut 7:6-9; 26:16-19; Isa 63:11-14). As a reflection of God's holiness, Israel

God expected the Israelites to behave in such a way that modeled his own holiness. He established these expectations through the Mosaic Covenant given to the Hebrews at Sinai. By living according to these commandments, the covenant people of God would have shown the surrounding nations that Yahweh was the true God. Their conduct, as outlined in the Law and confirmed in the covenant, would be a testimony to their absolute monotheism.

The Law, given as the basis for the Mosaic Covenant, could be summarized as love for God and fairness to others. Moses elaborated further on the details of this behavior in his instructions for the Israelite's entrance into the Promised Land.¹⁰

Contained within this model of behavior were commandments of worship, beneficence and non-maleficence. John Calvin summarized it this way:

After having expounded each Commandment in its order it now remains for us to see what is the sum of the contents of the Law, and what the aim and object of its instructions. For Paul elicits its true use, when he declares that its end is "charity, out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned," (1 Timothy 1:5) . . . Now, it is contained in two Tables, so also Moses reduces it to two heads, that we should love God with our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves; for, although he does not unite the two in one passage, yet Christ, by whose Spirit he spoke, ought to suffice to explain to us his intention, (Matthew 22:37) for, when he was asked

was to be pure, totally separated from the moral pollution of [neighboring] nations. Israel established an identity of separateness and God sanctified His name, setting it apart from the names of the gods that the Gentile nations worshipped. The Sinai covenant, then, is a covenant of grace just like the others. The mass of laws given were not evidence of a legalistic relationship with God but rather the necessary code of practice for people who now belong to God and want to know how to live lives which will please Him – in just the same way that Christians live in accordance with strict moral rules, because their relationship with God is based on love and joy and who are grateful to know how to behave in the right ways to please God. Throughout the time of the Old Testament, Israel was to proclaim God's salvation to the nations (Deut 28:9-10; Pss 67; 96; 105:1-11; Isa 49:6). Israel's prophets expected that all nations on earth one day would acknowledge God (I Chr 16; Pss 47; 96; 99; 100; 117; Isa 2:2-4; 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; Mic 4:1-3; Hab 2:14, 20; Zech 8:20-23). God blessed Israel so that all nations may come to [recognize] His sovereignty." David Williams, "Principles Of Biblical Covenant And Blessing," Oocities.org, last modified 2016, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.oocities.org/davidmwilliams/missa.html>.

¹⁰The instructions of the Mosaic Law are the substance of the Pentateuch. Specific instructions for the Israelite's behavior and consequent actions upon entering the Promised Land were outlined in the book of Deuteronomy.

what was the great Commandment of the Law, he replied that the first indeed was, that God should be loved, and the second like unto it, regarding the love of our neighbor; as if he had said, that the whole perfection of righteousness, which is set before us in the Law, consists of two parts, that we should serve God with true piety, and conduct ourselves innocently towards men according to the rule of charity.¹¹

Thus, the people of Israel, living under the conditions of covenant relationship with God, would live as a testimony to God's holiness and justice by the way they agreed to treat God and each other.

The lifestyle of covenant relationship identified Israel's purpose to be a "light unto the nations."¹² Beyond the spiritual and national benefits provided specifically to the people of Israel, the presence of covenant between them and God created a testimony of God's purposes and the persona of his attributes. Regardless of Israel's failure to hold onto the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant because of their disobedience, the nature of the covenant continued intact and God remained faithful.

The Promise of Governance in the Davidic Covenant

The Davidic Covenant was granted to the people of Israel as a promise of deliverance and dominion through reverent governance. The primary text of the Davidic

¹¹John Calvin, *Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 190.

¹²Although Isa 42:5-6 ("Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 'I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations'") speaks prophetically of the Messiah fulfilling this obligation, it had been required of Israel. Israel failed miserably as evidenced in Isa 42:18-22: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, 'Restore!'"

Covenant is 2 Samuel 7:16: “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” This promise is God’s commitment through covenant that he would raise up a righteous human king to rule his people, a king unlike the kings of the other nations and certainly unlike the first and preceding king, King Saul. He would be a king who would love God and would live a life that is pleasing to him. He would be a “man after God’s heart” as God declares through prophet Samuel following Saul’s abomination:¹³

And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you. (1 Sam 13:13-14)

A king serving under such recognition of God’s authority was a new paradigm for the fledgling monarchy.

David’s capable leadership secured the promise of peace and justice under the Davidic Covenant because of his submission to the sovereignty of God.¹⁴ G. R. Lanier notes that the conflict that faced the newly structured kingship would center around the

¹³The account is provided in the preceding verses of 1 Sam 13:1-12. King Saul commits to go into battle against the Philistines but refuses to wait for Samuel’s arrival when the battle turns against them. Impatient, he presents the sacrifice himself and forces his rejection from God as king. Samuel prophesies his replacement by a king who would please God and seek his glory above all else.

¹⁴The issue of leadership among the people of Israel had been an unresolved issue since the occupation of Canaan. G. R. Lanier writes, “The monarchy arose in Israel out of a lengthy era of chaos following the age of the patriarchs. During the period of the judges, the tribes existed in a loose and often competitive relationship with one another. The succession of judges and alternating focus between northern and southern tribes emphasizes the absence of centralized leadership and the security offered by dynastic succession. The resultant cyclical pattern of sin, oppression, and deliverance further emphasizes the lack of a unifying king, as sounded in the refrain, ‘In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes’ (Judg 21:25; compare Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1).” G. R. Lanier, *Davidic Covenant, The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

balance of power in transitioning to a human monarchy from a pure theocracy. He put it this way:

David and his descendants' role as 'vassals' of the covenant with Yahweh ... has implications for the role of the king. The biblical account makes it clear that the move from a theocratic form of government (as in the wilderness) to a human monarchy does not mean that Yahweh is no longer true king of His people. Rather, the Davidic king takes the role of God's vice-regent: the earthly sovereign whose exercise of rulership is to be an expression of God's own sovereign will. The Israelite king does not have absolute authority over anything; his rule must always be subordinate to the Torah and Yahweh's will as revealed through the prophets.¹⁵

The promise to raise up such a man among the Israelites was a covenant of deliverance from the oppressions of other nations and of dominion over their enemies. The king that would rule under the Davidic Covenant would defend the people against attack and rule in such a way that peace and justice would reign among all.¹⁶

Through the testimony of covenant relationship God's people became a recognizable entity. As David ruled under the sovereignty of God, the people of Israel prospered and the tribes became unified as a nation under their king. David declares in Psalm 22:25-28:

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

¹⁵Lanier, *Davidic Covenant*. 213.

¹⁶Lanier goes on to say, "In the primary texts concerning the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:8-16; 23:5; Pss 89:3-4; 132:1-18), God commits to rule over His people through the human king. He promises to defend His people from enemies, and to foster eternal peace and justice. The Davidic promise follows other major Old Testament covenants, including those with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:8-17), Abraham (Gen 12:1-9; 15:1-20; 17:1-14; 22:15-18), and Moses (Exod 19-24; Deuteronomy), and precedes the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Next to the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant and the kingly promises it contains receives the largest amount of attention within the Old Testament writings." *Ibid.*, 206.

David's confident assertion was that worshipping God, facilitated by the unique relationship with him through covenant, would bear witness to the nations and draw them to acknowledge him in worship also. Consequently, the covenant relationship of God to humanity provided a display of God's glory that granted lasting benefit for those who live under the banner of his authority.¹⁷ The conditions required that its leaders live under submission to his sovereignty, as evidenced in his relationship to Israel through the Davidic Covenant.

The Provision of Relationship in the New Covenant

The relationship of God and humanity through the covenants found their fulfillment in the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah¹⁸ and clarified in Hebrews 8:10-12:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

¹⁷David Williams comments, "The perceived benefits were protection for enemies (1 Samuel 8:19-20) and spiritual and moral leadership (1 Samuel 8:1-5). This reflected a turning away from complete trust in God himself as Israel's king, able and willing to protect and guide His people (1 Samuel 8:6-9; 10:17-19). A king was granted to Israel, but when Saul proved to be disobedient and unworthy of the trust which the people had put in him, God did not turn to the people to point out this had been inevitable; rather from his grace and commitment to Israel he not only continued to allow a further series of kings, but actually initiated the election of a young shepherd. God made a covenant with David which promised that his descendants would always rule as the rightful kings in Jerusalem (as described in Psalm 89:3-4)." Williams, "Principles of Biblical Covenant and Blessing."

¹⁸Scripture says, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:31-34).

The unique nature of this covenant was the focus its corrective measure. As David Williams states, “There are no direct concerns about laws in this new relationship or any annulment of the laws or principles of the previous covenants. The problems of the past were due to the people, and not the covenants of God. A new heart was needed, not new laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).” Rather than attending to the matter of obedience through the implementation of another legal paradigm, God issued forth a resolution that would be once and finally fully satisfied according to the requirements of his holiness. God himself, through the person of his own Son, would fulfill and secure man’s compliance with the expectations of the covenant through obedience to the Mosaic Law. Under this New Covenant, the elect would enjoy the place of beneficiary as Christ fulfilled the obligations of holiness that would be required of both him and man.

The provision for this arrangement was unique from all previous covenants. Both God and humanity would now be bound by relationship in faith rather than compliance to rules. T. D. Lea put it this way:

Fellowship with God would be direct and immediate. God would not appoint any privileged class of priests to teach others, but all would know him. All distinctions of rank and importance in the new community would disappear. The knowledge of God would be spread from the least of them to the greatest. The Holy Spirit, who teaches all things, will introduce all believers to a close walk with God (John 14:26). God would not confine the knowledge of him to a privileged few. All those under the new covenant would enjoy a walk of deep fellowship with God.¹⁹

Just as Isaiah had prophesied, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isa 7:14-

¹⁹T. D. Lea, *Hebrews, James*; Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 156.

15). Matthew explained the significance of his name Immanuel by its meaning, “God with us” (Matt 1:23). Through the incarnation, God entered into a new relationship with humanity that availed him to fellowship with men in a way that had never been expressed before. In his commentary on the Book of Hebrews, W. C. Fields wrote,

The new covenant therefore would operate by internal compulsion rather than by external restraint as in the old covenant. There would be no longer the need for a human priestly class, since the covenant people will know God directly in their own hearts and minds. God will put away their sins to free the way for unhindered fellowship.²⁰

The New Covenant was, therefore, a covenant of relationship that made full provision for man to reconcile the privilege that was lost when the Edenic Covenant was broken.

The Application of Covenant among Humanity

God has established a pattern of covenant in his relationship to humankind that should be duplicated among humans, specifically as it concerns their relationship to others in the body of Christ. He has granted provision, forgiveness, dominion and relationship to those he has chosen to show mercy by his grace. The means by which he has chosen to convey these blessings has been in the proclamation of covenantal agreements. Therefore, as the elect gathers to receive the provisions of the covenant established in Christ, a similar paradigm should be followed for the corporate assembly. Each organized assembly of the local church should acknowledge its need for an articulated covenant that establishes the provisions, boundaries and expectations of their relationship together.

²⁰W. C. Fields, “Hebrews,” in *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary*, ed. H. F. Paschall and H. H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 778.

Scripture supports the practice of establishing covenant relationships with other people throughout the Old Testament, and in the New Testament as well. Old Testament occasions include Isaac's covenant of peace with King Abimelech in Genesis 26:28, Jonathan's covenant of friendship with David in the house of Saul in 1 Samuel 18:3, and a covenant of acceptance made between the elders of Israel with David as king in 2 Samuel 5:3. Although the usage of a formal covenant agreement is predominately an Old Testament venture, the concept carries over into the New Testament as well.²¹ The occasions of covenant as witnessed in Scripture call for a definite commitment among two or more individuals for the good of each other's interests in the advancement of their common goals.

While the blessing of salvation by faith is received individually under the grace of God, the practical application of the blessings realized in the New Covenant is intended for corporate distribution and application in the assembly of the elect. This point was Paul's intention as he wrote the epistles, specifically to the churches of Ephesus and Corinth. He wrote in Ephesians 2:19-22:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

To the Corinthians, he wrote,

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to

²¹According to D. Allen, "The word covenant in the New Testament is *diatheke*, and it functions as the equivalent for the Old Testament *berit*. It occurs thirty-three times." D. Allen. *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. D. S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 626.

another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Cor 12:7-11)

The very practice of organizing in the local church is, by virtue of its action, the common acceptance of a covenant relationship between those who have chosen to assemble together. Jack Lash, Senior Pastor of Gainesville Presbyterian Church in Gainesville, VA explained it this way on the church's website:

Each believer, besides having a personal relationship with God, is also in a legal covenant with God (the new covenant) and therefore with his church in the world. The fact that it is a legal covenantal relationship and not just a personal intimate relationship necessitates legal actions and records with regard to baptism (which is the covenant ceremony establishing a covenant with God and with His Church universal and with a specific branch of that Church) Transferring church membership is merely the transferring of a covenant from one specific branch of Christ's Church to another much like a citizen would transfer his citizenship from one state to another. As all citizens of the U.S.A. must also be citizens of a particular state in the U.S.A., so all members of Christ's body must be members of a particular branch of Christ's body.²²

Some might refuse this conclusion as an unwelcome application. D. Allen suggests a different perspective. He explains it this way: "Definitionally, a covenant is an agreement between two parties, whether equals or not, that signified a relationship whereby the two bound themselves to each other, either conditionally or unconditionally."²³ Based on that definition, it must be contended that a church gathering together regularly for the occasions of worship and teaching does so on the grounds of a shared purpose and is, therefore, exercising a form of informal covenant relationship already.

²²Jack Lash, "Biblical Reasons for Church Membership," Gainesville Presbyterian Church, last modified September 1995, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.gpcweb.org/is-church-membership-in-the-bible->.

²³Allen, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, 626.

The prevalent struggle among many churches today could be minimized if the congregants of these churches would adopt a particular covenant that can be shared by all who participate. At issue however, is the apparent ambition of many churches to reject such an agreement as they pursue interests that conflict with shared commitment among all. As Michael J. Svigel states,

In our culture of competing churches, lackluster commitments, and consumer-driven spirituality, the idea of local church membership has suffered greatly. The classic biblical concept of a family's covenant commitment to a definable body of believers under ordained leadership with a common calling and mutual concern has consequently been treated with skepticism, disbelief, or even contempt. This kind of cavalier treatment of the local church reflects the low commitments we see throughout our culture as marriage vows are shattered, contracts are breached, and promises are broken. However, just as Christians are called to affirm their marriage vows, fulfill their contracts, and keep their promises, we are also expected to fulfill the covenant commitment we make when we publicly join in membership to a local church.²⁴

Developing a covenant relationship and committing with one another publicly to agreed expectations will bring benefits that follow a similar pattern to the covenants between and God and humanity.

The Provision of Accountability for the Presumption of Holiness

The requirement of absolute holiness in the eyes of God has not changed, nor has it been eliminated as the standard by which God will judge all humans. Just as it was required of the Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant, it is required of people today that they should be found blameless and without stain of guilt. The provisions of the New Covenant offer acquittal for that guilt through the atonement provided in Christ and

²⁴Michael J. Svigel, "Retro Christianity: Reclaiming the Forgotten Faith," last modified August 11, 2011, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.retrochristianity.org/2011/08/11/church-membership-as-a-covenant-commitment/>.

applied by faith in his name. Each person, though forgiven, remains obligated to fulfill the commission to teach obedience to all the commands that Christ has given.²⁵

Likewise, believers are to hold each other accountable for this obedience and call each other to repentance when disobedience has become an issue of unrepentance.

Two such occasions occur in the epistles that require the members of the specified church to confront an issue of unrepentant sin. Both occasions are confronted in the epistles and are written to the congregations rather than to the individuals. The first, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, speaks specifically to a particular situation that is being overlooked, and in some ways condoned, by the leaders and members of the church in Corinth. The second occasion is found in Galatians 6:1-2, addressing the hypothetical occasion of a brother overtaken in sinful behavior who is apparently unable to overcome his habit. In both of these situations, though varying in intensity, Paul admonishes the fellow members to deal swiftly and humbly with the offending brother.

The question that must be answered of the churches is, “With what authority will the members address the issue for reproof?” The answer to this question must be based upon the provision of accountability that is granted to all members who have covenanted together for the presumption of holiness under the stipulations of covenant membership. Just as God initiated the expectations within the Mosaic Covenant as a testimony to the nations of his own holiness, the provisions made available in covenant relationship among members of a specified congregation serve as a witness to the enduring holiness of God and the expectations upon his people. According to Svigel,

²⁵This is the Great Commission found in Matt 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

“The Old Testament background illuminates Paul’s intention here. Only those who were covenanted members of Israel were responsible to its laws and therefore accountable to its discipline.”²⁶ This structure of closed community had to have some form of obligation to each other that was organized by designated leadership. To this Svigel adds, “Simply put, without a covenanted submission of believers to one another and to the established leadership, the kind of church discipline described by Jesus and the apostles is simply impossible.”²⁷ The only way to truly hold each other accountable to holiness is through a covenant relationship. Consequently, the only way to act on this accountability would be through a legitimate form of covenant commitment that empowers a response by those involved in the case of transgression.

The Provision of Authority for the Promise of Governance

Structured leadership is a common component of God’s provision to his people. There are many examples of God’s special anointing being placed upon men and women for the purpose of leading his people in campaigns of victory and in the daily obligations of responsibility. In the Old Testament, the prophets, the judges, the kings, the priests and common men such as Nehemiah are all examples of leaders assigned to the task of organizing and administrating the daily affairs of God’s people. New Testament examples include each of the apostles, the elders and Jesus himself. In order for the men and women to have their place of governance among the people of God, authority had to be granted upon them by God. To this point Svigel says, “The fact that

²⁶Svigel, “Retro Christianity.”

²⁷Ibid.

leaders are exhorted to take care of the members of their churches demonstrates that they have a God-given responsibility for a particular definable covenant community. Without such a covenant, leaders could not responsibly and legitimately exercise such authority.”²⁸

A faithful church will be led by pastors who will lead and be followed in way that honors Christ. This statement is the exhortation given to the elders by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-4. He says,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The fact that God intends this counsel to be received by particular men who are serving as elders in the local church gives credibility to organized leadership that has been intentionally and formally empowered to lead. Furthermore, it can be inferred that God intends for a church to be led by called out men who serve under the authority of God and in the structure of authority granted to them. Mark Dever makes this point in his book, *What Is A Healthy Church?* He writes, “All churches have had individuals designated to perform the functions of elders, even if those individuals are called by other titles, such as deacon or director.”²⁹ The presence of such leadership requires two components that become necessarily apparent. First, there must be a church structure in place that identifies official organization; and second, within that structure there must be an agreement that facilitates appropriate submission to the appointed leadership. The

²⁸Svigil, “Retro Christianity.”

²⁹Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 114.

solution to both of these is a covenant agreement among members that makes provision of authority for the promise of governance.

The Provision of Acceptance for the Provision of Relationship

The New Covenant offers acceptance to all through faith in Jesus Christ, including those who may have otherwise been excluded under the terms of the previous covenants. The incarnation was the first step toward a relationship between God and humanity that was personal in nature. The presence of Jesus Christ among humans established a paradigm shift in the way people communicated with God and with each other. Jesus said to his disciples on the final evening of his ministry here on earth, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). These words reveal a rare disposition of acceptance among those who share a common love for Christ. The apostle John, who would have been present to hear Jesus speak these words, said,

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)

This statement of mutual compassion is the encouragement that runs throughout the New Testament. Believers are to love God and love others with the same love that has been granted through Christ.

God built the dynamic of community into the DNA of his church. The benefit of belonging is evident from its very inception as recorded in Acts 2:44-46: “And all who

believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.” When the members of a church commit to live in covenant relationship with each other, there develops an organism of community that exists among its participants. This community of belonging and acceptance is the intended relationship that is to be experienced among God’s people. Membership through covenant relationship makes provision for the unique image of familial love in the local church.

Conclusion

Covenant relationship is the structure of organized relationship that God has chosen to establish his glory among all of his creation. He built into the boundaries of his promises to humanity an economy that equipped, protected, disciplined and led the people of his own possession. He obligated himself to humanity’s predicament and remained faithful despite their failure to comply with the terms of his provision. God has chosen this pattern of relationship as the paradigm for his association with humanity. Through the design of covenant relationship he has granted the provisions of accountability for the collective holiness of his people, authority for leadership and acceptance into a family that is united by love. These blessings are more fully realized under the terms of membership that is secured by covenant agreement. Therefore, covenant relationship should be seen as the legitimate pattern for believers to follow in their association with each other through membership in the local church.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL SUPPORT
FOR COVENANT MEMBERSHIP
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The church is intended to be a venue of fellowship and cooperation that is knitted together by the unity of purpose in fulfilling the Great Commission. One way to encourage the continued success of its cooperation is through the assurances provided in covenant membership. In addition to these assurances, certain sociological benefits can be realized when the members of a church as a community of faith commit to each other in covenant relationship. These benefits include cooperation, accountability, diversity, and commitment.

The Inclusive Opportunities for Cooperation

Participation in the local church calls for a culture of one accord in purpose and affections. The required harmony to achieve such a climate will be volatile at best if there is no organized assurance of cooperation. The issue of cooperation is a constant theme throughout the epistles as the apostles further elaborated on the commands of Christ as revealed in his prayer in John 17:18,¹ “As you sent me into the world, so I have

¹John Calvin wrote of this portion of Christ’s High Priestly Prayer, “He [Jesus] confirms his prayer by another argument; namely, because the calling of Christ and of the apostles is the same calling, and is common to both. ‘I now,’ he says, ‘appoint them to an office, which I have hitherto held by thy command; and, therefore, it is necessary that they should be furnished with the power of the Spirit, that they may be able to sustain so weighty a charge.’” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 18 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 180. Thus the necessity of cooperation from the disciples was of foremost importance. This is not in any way to diminish the work of the Holy Spirit through them but to highlight the significance of their acceptance of this task that was

sent them into the world.” The apostle Paul elaborates in Ephesians 4:11-13a on God’s method in equipping the church for the very purpose of cooperating in ministry: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.”² Furthermore, through Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthian church, an illustration is provided of how easy it can be to deny the blessing of working together when we are pulled in different directions with nothing to establish our commitment to one another. Thom Rainer, in his book *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, commented on the importance of involvement to those who were “formerly unchurched”³ in the section titled “Why They Returned and Stayed”:

When we asked the formerly unchurched the straightforward question, ‘What keeps you active in church?’ their responses were enthusiastic. Sixty-two percent of those interviewed gave us a response that indicated their ministry involvement to be the glue that held them to the church From the perspective of the formerly unchurched, being involved in ministry has been the key factor in the their assimilation in the church While no single issue can explain why the formerly

now to be laid before them. Their cooperation in accepting this task would soon be elevated to their encouragement to the church as a whole to join together in cooperative effort for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.

²James Montgomery Boice clarified the confusion over this passage. The misinterpretations of which have caused many to miss the valuable relationship of cooperation between members of the church. He wrote in his commentary of Ephesians: “In older versions of the English Bible there was a small but serious error that may have contributed to the church’s blindness at this point or, to state the matter another way, may have resulted from its prejudice. It involves a comma. In the original King James Version (there has been a change in more recent editions), Ephesians 4:11-12 said, ‘And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, [that is the comma] for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’” According to Boice, “Armitage Robinson was probably the first commentator to notice and insist that it was a mistake. He argued-and virtually all commentators since have agreed with him-that the comma should be eliminated. Without the comma, the passage says something entirely different. Instead of giving three tasks to ‘ministers,’ it gives one task to the clergy (‘equip the saints’) and another to the laity (‘do the ministry’). As a result of both fulfilling their proper, God-given function, ‘the body of Christ may be built up.’” James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 140.

³Rainer defines the “formerly unchurched” as “one who has not been in church, except sporadically, for at least ten years (most for a lifetime) but has recently become active in a church. All of the formerly unchurched have also recently become Christians, not merely church attenders.” Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19.

unchurched stay at a particular church, these new Christians make one point perfectly clear. Get them involved in ministry and they are much more likely to stay.”⁴

The question then follows as to what it is that will further guarantee their continued participation and involvement through a more certain presence. Again, Rainer’s findings reveal a positive trend: “The formerly unchurched deeply desire to be a part of a church that makes a difference. They want to participate in a church that has clear direction and vision. And they do not mind, indeed they desire, churches that expect them to do ministry for God in the church where they met Christ.”⁵ When the church offers an opportunity to cooperate in ministry based on shared expectations among all who are connected in the body, these statistics reveal that members are far more likely to participate and to remain involved. The challenge to these findings is a lack of cooperation that leads to the dividing up of individual interests offering no sense of contribution to the whole.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, members of the church are urged to avoid divisions that had been stimulated by their personal preferences and were resulting in quarrels. There was growing tension among certain factions that were giving loyalty to certain personalities. The apostle Paul addresses the issue in verse 12, “What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’” The glaring tension among the Corinthians was accelerated by the apparent insistence among the membership to divide into groups that appealed to their liking. Such intentional division was an obvious departure from the apostolic teaching as seen in the Ephesians text above. Consequently, division was developing among them

⁴Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 123.

⁵Ibid., 124

and a first-century church split was underway. Paul retorts in the following verse, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (v.13). The anticipated response to his rhetorical question comes to its stated prominence two chapters later in 1 Corinthians 3:4-10:

For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

The text concludes with Paul’s commission to preach the gospel. Believers are reminded that neither our personal preferences nor our individual goals should be in competition with God’s purpose and glory as it is being lived out in the corporate context of the local church.

There are at least two threats to cooperation as intended to be lived out in the membership of the local church. The first is individualism; the second is egocentrism. Any climate in the local church that accommodates either of these two dynamics would be out of step with the intended goal of the Great Commission, and in fact, the entire New Testament. The very text of the Great Commission includes a combination of participles added to the verb “make disciples” that require deliberate effort to work with and for others. Believers are to “go,” “baptize” them and “teach” them to obey the law of Christ. The object of their action toward others defines each of these. Consequently, the charge for cooperation is not simply the ideal; it is the directive for our commission as the organized people of God.

Cooperation through participation and interaction within the church as it is providentially provided is necessary to a believer's vitality and effectiveness in Christian living. There is no place for intentional individualism in the life of a believer. Ken Hemphill writes in his book *Connected Community* from his iBelieve series, "The moment you were saved, the Spirit immersed you into the body of Christ. We express this heavenly reality by developing an intimate relationship with Christ's earthly body, the church."⁶ Our connection to the church as it is realized in the local expression through covenant community is foundational to our identity as Christians. To this point, Hemphill continues, "When a 'professed believer' ignores the body of Christ or treats it with apathy, it is an egregious sin and a reproach to Christ who sent his Spirit to immerse the redeemed into his body."⁷ By contrast, God is glorified and his church unified as the Spirit of Christ knits together the unique personalities of the membership body. Thus, rather than pursuing a journey of solitude, the follower of Christ is granted the provision of communal faith through the shared confidence gained when the church gathers in covenant relationship.

Just as there is no place for individualism, there is no place for egocentrism, for such an attitude opposes the very essence of the law of Christ. As Paul says to the churches in Galatia regarding their conduct toward others, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14). Selfless charity is to

⁶Ken Hemphill, *Connected Community* (Tigerville, SC: Auxano Press, 2011), 59.

⁷Ibid. Hemphill introduced this statement with a strong criticism of what he calls "Churchless Christianity." He wrote, "'Churchless Christianity' and 'apathetic membership' are the two most dangerous elements of modern day Christianity. While some persons today claim Christ but ignore the church, many others go through the motion of joining a church but then treat it as if it is nothing more than another organization like a community club or fraternal group. No other earthly institution has the significance of the church. It alone holds the key to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19) and it alone remains for all eternity (Revelation 21:2)."

be our goal and aim as we press forward in Christian living, especially in the context of serving alongside fellow Christians. We are to seek to love others; together giving advantage to the general whole. Covenant relationship assures that this goal can be pursued. Beneficence is the very essence of what it means to assemble as the church. As one pastor put it, “The church was never intended to be a group seminar for the entertaining of the saints. The church is not here to give personal halo massages.”⁸

Stanley Grenz explains it this way:

Even the Greek word translated *church* highlights this people orientation. Today we tend to regard the word as part of the “language of Zion,” one of those special terms we use when we want to speak about matters of faith. Yet the early believers did not coin the term. Instead, *church* (*ekklesia*) was a common word in the first-century Roman world. Arising from the verb *to call* (*kaleo*) plus the preposition *out of* (*ek*), *ekklesia* simply means *assembly*. More specifically, an *ekklesia* was a gathering of the citizens of a given community who had been called together to tend to city affairs.⁹

Thus, the occasion for the assembly was organizing to look out for the good of the whole and to provide a venue for cooperative effort. Likewise, the Scripture uses this term in the context of the church as being those who are assembled and organized for the occasion of the whole, rather than for the benefit of one or a few. Mutually agreeing through covenant relationship to share in the interests of each other rather than catering solely to individual needs will further ensure that the command for cooperation can be obeyed.

⁸Tom Nelson, “The Life of Freedom,” Denton Bible Church Media RSS, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.dbcmedia.org/sermons/the-life-of-freedom/>.

⁹Stanley Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 208.

The Mutual Benefit of Accountability

A church that desires for its corporate witness to remain consistent with biblical commands must be willing to seek the good of each member by holding each other responsible in the ways of righteousness. This effort requires an organized presumption of purity that must be pursued and maintained for which each member must be held accountable. The church that is joined together by covenant relationship is afforded the proper venue for insisting upon the biblical expectations of individual purity and for correction when those expectations have fallen into gross error. When there is sinfulness that remains unrepentant, covenant relationship identifies the error, calls for correction, urges for restoration and provides protective boundaries against pride in the hearts of those who bring correction.

It was expected of the New Testament churches that they should hold each other accountable for behaviors that were inconsistent with the Christian witness. This commitment is evidenced in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians,¹⁰ the Ephesians,¹¹ and perhaps, as will be explained here, most clearly to the Galatians and the Corinthians. His instructions to both of these latter churches were given in response to current problems in need of immediate response. He urges them toward restoring those who had fallen prey to sinfulness but to do so in such a way that is consistent with the Holy Spirit's person and presence. The necessary context for each is a community of faith knitted together by a covenantal relationship that not only allows for such a restorative process but insists

¹⁰Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess 5:11).

¹¹Paul also wrote to the Ephesians, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3).

upon it as an obligation of mutual accountability. When members of a church are afforded the opportunity to share together in an atmosphere of love and respect, united by covenant relationship, accountability becomes more than a means of monitoring behavior. Under this structure, accountability becomes a beneficial social construct through which relationships are formed and lives are sculpted. Jonathon Leeman wrote in his book *Church Membership* from the *Building Healthy Churches* series:

The local church community should be a place where Christians form and shape one another for good through all the dynamics of friendship. Christian friends are surely valuable inside and outside the same local church. But friends within the local church will be formed by the same ministry of the Word, giving them the opportunity to extend that ministry more carefully into one another's lives throughout the week.¹²

Accountability for Restoration

Paul wrote his epistle to the churches in Galatia to correct the errors that had begun to surface regarding freedom in Christ and how it was to be lived in the context of salvation by faith alone. As the letter draws to a close he plainly states, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). He makes this point to emphasize that the Christian's life is to be lived in a way that is congruent with the conduct of one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. Regrettably, however, some were teaching that the freedom found in Christ could be used as license for sinful indulgence. Others had become proud in their religious piety and were championing rituals and abstinence as their testimony. The pendulum had swung to both extremes and both had become conceited against the other. It had become a source of great confusion among many and causing division for the whole. Complicating the situation further, neither

¹²Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 98.

faction was acting in such a way that could lead to correction or reconciliation. The admonition Paul provided was intended to instruct them in how they were to behave toward one another in issues of error, whether in behavior or in doctrine.

Before guiding them through the process and context of how we should treat other believers struggling in sin, Paul addresses the issue of the attitude with which we are to confront. He says, “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:26). Between both factions, those who were taking pride in their legalism and those who were relishing in their freedom, was the sinful pursuit of religious dominance disguised as spiritual maturity. Both were claiming superiority over the other and both were trying to eclipse the opposing view. In spite of the issues that divided them, they had both embraced the sinfulness of arrogance and jealousy. It was this rancor that the apostle had already cautioned them against. Having spoken directly to their attitude he urges them to act in restorative love: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Their attempt at restoration would have to be approached from an attitude of humility and mutual understanding that there is within each of us a vulnerability to sin. The urging to restore is thus given under the presumption that, though inclined to sinfulness themselves, they possess the right to address issues in the life of another believer and to call upon them to repent. In order for this confidence to be the case, there must exist, by necessity, an assumed agreement of mutual accountability. Otherwise the rebuke, humbly given or with arrogance, would justly fall upon deaf ears with no premise for response.

Accountability for Purity

The Corinthians likewise required admonition from the apostle Paul regarding their accountability to uphold the righteous standard within their community of faith. Unlike the Galatians who had become polarized by their opposing expectations of righteous behavior, the church in Corinth was guilty of apathy toward those living in public sinfulness and willfully accepting them into open fellowship. The leaders were apparently unwilling to address the issue and rather chose to welcome the behavior. Paul rebukes the congregation as a whole and instructs them to act decisively in order to urge repentance in the one who is in sin and to preserve the integrity of their corporate faithfulness. In order for Paul to insist on such a responsive action, there must have been an agreement, whether assumed or prescribed, that allowed for such action based on the blatant negligence of expectations. Having made it clear that these actions do not apply to those outside of the covenant community of faith, Paul further admonishes them to act accordingly in a way that is determined and resolute for the preservation of their corporate purity. Thus, Paul urges not only the offenders toward proper response but urges the congregation as a whole to maintain purity. An environment that facilitates such shared responsibility would require a relationship among its members that is held together by covenantal promise. The guidance he provides here and to the churches of Galatia reveals the necessary context of agreement in covenant relationship that must be present in order to lead others in repentance and restoration through mutual accountability.

The Inherent Opportunity for Diversity

When members of the church are unable to recognize the value of each individual participant, or when the necessity of contribution from each member carries little emphasis among the congregation as a whole, any effort given to achieving a common goal will be difficult to accomplish. Every area of the church will be affected, especially the elements that focus most upon pursuing the church's biblical purpose in fulfilling the Great Commission. Efforts to engage in missions and evangelism will be halted as the attention of the church is forced to turn inward in order to perpetuate internal issues of maintenance and preservation. By contrast, the church that is united under covenant relationship is better equipped to acknowledge the value of each member's participation and to assign appropriate value to each contributor. The command of Christ to love each other is fulfilled and the privilege to move forward is granted when the church is operating under appropriate covenant relationship that values and encourages the contributions of all included. This disposition was Paul's assertion as he commented on the issue of community in his letter to the churches of Rome.

The issue that Paul raises in Romans Chapter 12 addresses the joy of community that is expected among a very diverse population of the people of God in the context of the local assembly. As F. F. Bruce explains,

Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God's handiwork. It is so in nature; it is equally so in grace, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community. Here are men and women with the most diverse kinds of parentage, environment, temperament and capacity. Not only so, but since they became Christians they have been endowed by God with a wide variety of spiritual gifts as well. Yet because and by means of that diversity, all can co-operate for the good of the whole. Whatever form of services is to be rendered in the church, let it be rendered heartily and faithfully by those divinely qualified to render it, whether it be prophesying,

teaching, admonishing, administering, making material gifts, sick-visiting, or the performance of any other ministry.¹³

So it serves to presume that the church that is functioning in proper alliance among its members through covenant relationship will be the church that is most representative of the intentional diversity designed by God to fulfill his purposes. Moreover, the church that serves faithfully in its diversity will be the church that celebrates the beauty of community. In order for the church to attain and to fully value its diversity, there are these certain areas that must characterize the church, each of which will be discovered in and secured by covenant relationship: Everyone must be granted dignity and purpose, each person must determine to use their gifts for the benefit of others, and everyone must determine to love each other genuinely.

A community secured by covenant relationship recognizes the value of each participant and grants to each individual dignity and purpose. For someone to view others with such a special favor they must not think more highly of themselves than is warranted. Rather, as Paul says, they should “think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom 12:3b). Otherwise, it will be difficult to see the value of others in service to God when blinded by sententiousness. Instead, it must be noticed that each person in the body of Christ has been given a measure of faith and unique function intended to be compatible with the whole. We are to have “sober judgment” about the value of others and afford them the dignity that is due to them. We are to maintain this recognition of their value as we commit our own valuable gifting in service to them.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 214.

It is essential that each person committed to others in covenant relationship use their gifts for the benefit of others. Paul continues,

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:6-8)

We must all work together realizing that God has given each person spiritual gifts for the purpose of using those gifts in service to the church as a whole. A similar exhortation was given to the Corinthians: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Each person, therefore, is a vital participant in the value of the whole. Because every gift that is granted to its members is important for the well being of the body, no one should be excluded, nor should anyone feel as though they should be prohibited. The beauty of covenant relationship is that everyone who has committed to the others can and should participate in the edification and the building up of the church. Each person receives a gift. Some will prophecy; some will serve; some will teach; some will exhort; some will give generously; some will lead; and all will participate by the grace of God for the good of the whole because no one is gifted for the good of one. There is no room for self-exaltation, no room for condescension on others, and no room for apathy in a church that is united by covenant relationship.

The very essence behind a community of faith that is united by the joy of serving each other with the gifts that God has given is the determination to love each other with genuine affection. The apostle John made this point in the very popular section of his first epistle. He wrote, “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God

whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). Likewise, Paul makes this point in the continuing passages of Romans 12. He encourages that love should be genuine, without hypocrisy, hating what is evil and clinging on to that which is good. As John MacArthur writes in his commentary on Romans, “The verb *kollao* (to cling) is from *kolla* (glue) and came to be used of any bond – physical, emotional, or spiritual.”¹⁴ This level of affection is how the community of faith in covenant relationship loves each other. They hate the attitudes that bring division and “hold fast (like glue) to what is good” (Rom 12:9b). Furthermore, they are to “be devoted to one another with brotherly love” (Rom 12:10 NASB).

MacArthur continues:

“Be devoted to” and “brotherly love” carry synonymous ideas. “Devoted” translates *philostorgos*, a compound of *philos* (friend, friendly, friendship love) and *storge* (natural family love, which is not based on personal attraction or desirability). Brotherly love translates *phildelphia*, another compound – *phileo* (to have tender affection) and *adelphos* (brother). We are to have a loving filial affection for one another in the family of God.¹⁵

The beauty of living in covenant relationship is that love for each other is expressed with a love that is blessed and defined by God. Rather than loving others out of respect for who they are, love is granted because of what God has placed within. Therefore, true love, that which is secured by and lived out in covenant relationship in the community of faith, is not simply expressed to friends who attend the same church, but to friends who are actually more like family. To these who are our family we are to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10b).

¹⁴John MacArthur, *Romans, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 187.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 188 (emphasis original).

The Intrinsic Value of Commitment

Without the component of commitment that is inherent to covenant relationship, the required elements have no context for their actualization. Each element would be undermined from the outset by the lack of certainty in its conduct. By contrast, membership in the church that is constructed upon covenant relationship holds the pledge of mutual agreement as its assurance for fulfillment. This pledge has love as its foundation and unity as its result.

Biblical exhortation for commitment among members of the body of Christ is evidenced in the context of the church as early as the second chapter of Acts. The description provided here of the church in its earliest inception describes it this way: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The basis of their activity together was founded from the very beginning upon a reliable commitment of devotion to the shared joy of worshipping together and thereby establishing an initial, though not yet formalized, pattern of covenant in the community of faith. This pattern would soon become a motif for the church through the expression of love resulting in unity as is evidenced by the instructions given through the epistles. To the church of Ephesus Paul writes that they are to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). To the Colossians they are instructed to “bear with one another . . . and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:13a, 14). The Romans are told to “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10). Such obligation to love and patiently serve cannot be accomplished without a persistent pledge of commitment.

This commitment to each other through love was not simply a commandment without model. Paul expressed his faithful commitment to the churches under his care as he lamented to the Corinthians of their boasting and described his own burden of obligatory devotion. He wrote, “And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28). Such a commitment of devotion by Paul displays the template that we are to follow in covenant relationship. The church that is truly established by covenant in membership is not careless toward the welfare of each other but is committed to living according to the instructions given by Christ to the disciples on their final evening together. He commanded them to love each other so that the world would witness through their devotion to each other a commitment that resembled his own conduct with them (John 13:34-35). Each of the New Testament commandments to remain devoted to one another through the commitment of love, including the compulsion placed upon the apostles, was consistent with the instructions of Christ.

The Commitment to Serve

Jesus established the commitment to serve by his own example. He addressed the issue by answering the disciples’ question of who it is that should be considered greater among them:

And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:25-27)

Nevertheless, the inclination of fallen men and women to seek their own interests rather than serving others remains a threat to commitment among church members. Just as individualism and egocentrism erodes cooperation, so will members be likewise inclined to serve their own needs rather than the needs of others and to exalt themselves above even those with whom they are “united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). This predisposition is, of course, contradictory to the commands of scripture that we are to “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Rom 12:13). Fulfilling the biblical command of commitment must be driven by a commitment to serve that is sustained in covenant relationship. The inclination that discourages from serving and exalting one another will be a greater temptation apart from the covenant relationship that urges otherwise.

The Commitment to Love

A clear example of the command to love each other is given to all Christians in 1 John but is hindered when our hearts are at odds with God in sin, and consequently living out of fellowship with his people. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). As Stanley Grenz explains:

The presence of sin carries adverse effects in the realm of interpersonal relations. Viewed from this perspective, sin leads to alienation. We experience sin’s alienation in our relationship to God. God created us to be his friends - even his children. But we have chosen to live as God’s enemies (Romans 5:10a) Because we are alienated from God, sin alienates us from other humans as well. God designed us to enjoy wholesome, enriching relationships with each other.¹⁶

¹⁶Grenz, *Created for Community*, 99-100.

When covenant relationship is fashioned upon the premise that all who participate are redeemed from sin's curse there is a concurrent renewal of affection between the cooperating members. This converging renewal brings together those who were once alienated from God but are now brought close to Him. To further elaborate on this point, Grenz says further:

Our common allegiance to Jesus draws us together. Because our loyalty to him, we are committed to each other. We desire to 'walk' together as one discipleship band, to be a people in relationship with one another. We who name Jesus as Lord, therefore, become one body - a fellowshipping people, a community In conversion, he draws us out of our isolation and alienation. In so doing, he knits us together as one people. Indeed, there arises among us a oneness which is nothing less than the unity of the Spirit himself (Ephesians 4:3).¹⁷

Thus, a covenant relationship is built upon the ability to love each other through shared affection for Christ and the common indwelling of the Holy Spirit, resulting in the commitment to live together in loving fellowship.

Conclusion

Biblical membership in the local church is supported and sustained by covenant relationship. Within this ordered model, certain elements must be present and esteemed. Among these are unity with the brethren through cooperation, commitment and application of biblical truths and a desire to support one another in fulfilling the ministry of the gospel through the work of the church as it moves forward in the beauty of diversity as God has ordained. In order for these elements to be applied, however, there must be a paradigm in place that facilitates their function. It is within this paradigm that the necessity of covenant relationship is prescribed.

¹⁷Ibid., 214.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING A COVENANT VIEW OF MEMBERSHIP

This project sought to accomplish four goals at Westwood Baptist Church in Cleveland, Tennessee. These goals were to assess the current understanding of membership expectations among actively attending members, to develop an eight-week textual/topical sermon series based on the elements of the church covenant, to lead the congregation through the sermon series during the weekly worship gathering, and to develop an ongoing teaching guide for implementation into the existing membership information class.

The first goal of assessing the current understanding of membership expectations was chosen in order to determine what the prevalent attitude toward a covenant-based membership would be. The recent fluctuations in membership participation at Westwood Baptist Church had developed into what seemed to be an uncertainty of expectations among the congregation. Due to the lack of attention given to the reading of the covenant, many of the members either did not know the content of the covenant or were not aware that such a covenant existed at all. The purpose of this first goal was to gain a broad sense of the majority opinions.

The second goal of developing an eight-week sermon series was chosen to address each of the eight topics outlined in the covenant and to support these with a scripture text that directly addressed each subject area. Although the basic outline for the

sermon series was drawn directly from the covenant, the information gained from the surveys highlighted areas of uncertainty, confusion, or diversity. Some of these areas revealed too broad of an interpretation and required specific attention. This information was used to address these specific areas. The purpose of this goal was to organize this information into a textual/topical sermon series for presentation in the weekly assembly of the whole congregation.

The third goal of leading the whole congregation together through the sermon series was chosen as a means of distributing the material to all participating members of the church at one time. By communicating this information through sermon delivery, the information could be equitably disseminated to all who were actively participating in gathered worship. Furthermore, the information would be afforded a higher level of credibility through the authority of the pulpit. The purpose of this goal was to formally educate and increase the knowledge of the congregation on the biblical elements of the expectations expressed in the church covenant to which all members of Westwood Baptist Church are obligated.

The fourth goal of developing a small group teaching guide was selected in order to continue teaching the expectations outlined in the covenant as new attenders considered membership. The preceding goal of presenting this information to the whole congregation at one time would accomplish its purpose for the existing membership, but as new members are added, a means of providing this information would become necessary for them as well. The purpose of this goal was to create a sustainable method of ensuring that all members may receive instruction on the expectations of membership as outlined in the church covenant.

Phase 1: Participant Enlistment and Survey

In the first phase of this project, members of the congregation were invited to participate in a survey.¹ They were informed that their participation would contribute to the ongoing assessment of membership expectations at Westwood Baptist Church. Invitations to participate were distributed through the church's email database to all active and participating members.² Additionally, notices were printed in the weekly bulletin for two consecutive weeks and announcements were made at the beginning of each gathered worship assembly two weeks in advance. The initial goal was to enlist at least thirty survey participants so that approximately 5 percent of the active and participating members could be represented. To encourage maximum exposure, there were no limitations on the number of surveys distributed and all qualified applicants were accepted.

In order to qualify to take part in the survey, participants were asked to agree to attend at least seven of the eight worship services in which the sermon series would be delivered. In the event that it would be necessary for them to miss one of the eight sermons, they were encouraged to listen to the media file located in the online sermons section on the church's website. Furthermore, they were advised that a follow-up survey would be distributed and collected and that they would be requested to complete it. Qualified applicants were instructed to visit the welcome desk before any gathered worship assembly prior to the beginning of the sermon series to pick up their survey and asked to return the completed survey within seven days of receipt.

¹See appendix 1 for the *Membership Assessment Survey*.

²Active and participating members would be defined as members who had participated in at least one of the following four activities within the preceding six months: a record of financial giving, Sunday School attendance, attendance in weekly gathered worship, or participation in membership meetings.

This phase of the project took two weeks and satisfied the first goal of at least thirty survey participants turning in their completed surveys before the sermon series began. Fifty-two surveys were distributed to candidates who satisfied the qualifications for participation. Forty-five surveys were collected prior to the beginning of the sermon series. These forty-five completed surveys were collected and the results were tabulated for review and for post-series comparison. The results suggested that a level of trust still remained among the congregation but that their trust for the leadership had been compromised. There appeared to be a strong desire to develop relationships within the church family.³ With these preliminary conclusions, I moved on to the second phase of the project.

Phase 2: Sermon Series Development and Delivery

The purpose of the second phase was to develop and deliver a sermon series based on the eight thematic areas drawn from the church covenant.⁴ Each of these eight areas was assigned a biblical text that provided support for its relative theme. Therefore, the texts for each of these thematic categories were selected topically with appropriate acknowledgement of the context of the passage. The themes and corresponding texts are as follows: Unified Affections (1 Cor 1:10-17); Brotherly Love (Eph 3:11-16); Congregational Worship (Heb 10:24-25); Biblical Discipleship (2 Cor 5:9-20); Harmonious Relationships (Eph 4:25-32); Genuine Witness (Rom 14:12-22);

³See appendix 8 for the tabulated results of the pre-series participant survey.

⁴See appendix 2 for the church covenant.

Cooperative Generosity (1 Cor 16:1-4); Unceasing Faithfulness (1 Cor 12:12-27).⁵ After reviewing the tabulated results of the survey, I finalized the outlines of each of the eight sermons and made notes accordingly.⁶ This phase was intended to satisfy both the goal of developing the eight-week sermon series and the goal of delivering the sermons to the congregation.

Before proceeding with the delivery of the sermon series, I submitted the sermon outlines, with notes, to two members of my associate pastoral staff for evaluation. It was necessary to achieve an affirmation from them that at least 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above levels before moving forward. By their assessment, each of the indicators satisfied or exceeded the “sufficient” level for content.⁷ Upon receipt of their evaluations, I asked them for suggestions on how to improve the content and ensure effective presentation. I applied their suggestions and moved forward with the sermon series on the following Sunday as the congregation gathered for weekly worship assembly. This portion of Phase 2 took two weeks to complete. The following portion took eight weeks to complete.

Sermon 1: Unified Affections

The first sermon, “Same Team, Same Cause,” focused on the call for unified affections from the statement in the church covenant, “We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The goal of the sermon was to lead the congregation to recognize the importance of developing a culture of one accord and

⁵See appendix 4 for a brief description of each week’s theme with applicable statement(s) from the church covenant and the selected text.

⁶See appendix 9 for the sermon outlines.

⁷See appendix 11 for the results of the pastoral staff sermon evaluation.

purpose among the church's membership. The text that was selected for this topic was 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

Biblical unity is not sameness but is a commitment to share together in common affection, specifically our love and response in faith to Jesus Christ. The issue in Corinth that necessitated this admonition from Paul was the division that had developed among them in their allegiance to particular men. Rather than setting their affections in one accord, they were choosing leaders of their own kind based on their preferential assessment of who had the better grasp of truth. Paul rebukes this polarization of loyalties and insists that each of their chosen leaders was an instrument to be used by the only one who was truly capable of uniting them in life. He contends that it is Christ alone that merits their affections and it is Christ alone that is to be their delight. Any other placement of affection on an individual man is not only unwarranted but would be a contradiction of that man's purpose in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Sermon 2: Brotherly Love

The second sermon, "The Prerequisite to Unity," focused on the way in which members of the church family are to view one another with dignity and value, and the subsequent affection that we are to afford each other. The theme was taken from the statement in the church covenant, "We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require." The text that was chosen for this sermon topic was Romans 12:3-14.

The call to unified affections must be precipitated by a balanced relationship to God and each other among the church family. Having established the necessity of one's

relationship to God in the preceding verses,⁸ Paul continues in verse 3 by urging believers to view others with dignity and to recognize that each person has value and purpose in the ministry of the church. He makes this point by recognizing specific gifts that are granted to individuals for the edification of the whole congregation. These gifts are not intended to be simply utilitarian in nature but are to be devotions by which believers express their love for one another. Therefore, they are to make an effort to live together well in the church, in genuine affection, by serving one another with the gift(s) that God has distributed.

Sermon 3: Congregational Worship

The third sermon, “The Necessity of Gathered Worship,” focused on the biblical command that all believers are to participate in corporate worship, as they are providentially able to assemble. The theme for this sermon was based on the statement from the church covenant, “We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.” The text that was chosen for this topic was Hebrews 10:24-25 in which the writer to the Hebrews admonishes against neglecting the gathered assembly. Just as the first recorded activity of the church reveals a commitment to community among the believers,⁹ we are to follow a similar paradigm in worshipping together.

⁸Leading up to verse 3, Paul writes, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2).

⁹The reference for this is Acts 2:42-45. They were always studying and always applying (Acts 2:42-43 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles”), and they were committed to being together and loving one another (Acts 2:44-45 “And all who

Christianity is communal in nature and every pursuit in the Christian life is to be done in the context of community. There are two priorities from this text that believers are to acknowledge in our commitment to gather. They are to “stir up one another” and to “encourage one another.” Both of these are facilitated in the priority of congregational worship. To “stir up one another” is to motivate each other in Christian devotion and to stimulate expression of love and good works in each other’s lives. Likewise, to “encourage one another” is to provide timely comfort and assurance. Both of these are to be done to “one another.” These are not individual exercises. They can only be done in the context of community. According to Don Whitney, “There’s an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the ‘meeting together’ with other believers.”¹⁰

Sermon 4: Biblical Discipleship

The fourth sermon, “Our Homes Will Be Christian,” focused on the essential commitment to establish our homes so that each family member’s heart is encouraged toward the gospel. The theme for this topic was taken from the statement in the church covenant, “We will endeavor to rear those that may be under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.” The text that was chosen to explicate this topic was Ephesians 6:1-4 in which the apostle Paul provides essential principles for raising our families.

believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need”).

¹⁰Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 111.

The instructions are first given to the children, then to the fathers, but both commands are to be applied as an obligation of the parents. Children are to be taught obedience to their parents by their parents; it is the parents' responsibility. Parents are to teach their children to obey and to honor them by teaching them respect. The best way to instill this respect into them is for parents to model such a respect for their own parents. Children should learn to honor their parents through expressions of love and devotion, and by providing care for them for as long and as often as is needed. Furthermore, children should learn to obey with honor and respect by the way their parents live their own personal lives as an example to them. The unique role of the father is to lead his family to Christ by guiding them and by teaching them with a nurturing temperament. By so doing, parents can become a model for justice, gentleness and honor, cultivating their hearts toward the gospel.

Sermon 5: Harmonious Relationships

The fifth sermon, "We Will Live in Harmony," focused on the pursuit of peace and reconciliation through all areas of daily living. The theme for this topic was based on the statement from the church covenant, "We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor to bear, with tenderness and sympathy, each other's burdens and sorrows; To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay." The text for this sermon was Ephesians 4:25-32 in which Paul encourages the churches in Ephesus to live in such a way with each other that is consistent with the Holy Spirit's presence within each person.

The way Christians treat each other, specifically those in one's church family, bears an evident reflection of one's relationship to God. Paul makes his point by first

reminding them of what kind of people Christians are to be and then establishes that, out of this new nature, believers are to live in harmony with each other. The text teaches that believers are to be honest with one another and to not deceive. Deception only serves to convince others that things are not as they seem. This type of deceit results in pretentiousness that builds walls as people mislead one another. Again, this duplicity is a reflection of one's relationship to God. As John wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Rather, believers are to be honest and careful about misguided words and emotions that will fester and will not heal. As walls are built through deception, truth will become relative to individual benefit; words and treatment of others will become corrupt. Such failure can be avoided by surrendering one's motives and emotions to the Holy Spirit and being kind to one another.

Sermon 6: Genuine Witness

The sixth sermon, "We Will Preserve Our Witness," focused on the attention that should be given to cultural proscriptions that might challenge the validity of the gospel testimony in the eyes of the community. The theme of this topic was taken from the statement in the church covenant, "We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life." The text that was used for this theme was Romans 13:8-14 in which Paul addresses, in a somewhat straightforward manner, the importance of how believers are to live carefully among those in the world that are outside of the church community.

One of the easiest ways to offend nonbelievers is to cheat them or to do them harm under a pretense of virtue, which may or may not be intentional. This type of indifference is why Paul says that Christians are to obligate ourselves to loving others by paying our debts and refusing to do them harm. Referring to the commandments, Paul declares that each of the laws are summed up in the Great Commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom 13:9).¹¹ Love is the fulfillment of the Law and love does no wrong to its neighbor (Rom 13:10). Therefore, followers of Christ have a divine command to love others in order to influence the world in a positive light. So believers are to lay aside the deeds of darkness and live different, better lives than those in the world, covering ourselves in Christ and allowing no opportunity for sin. To a world that wants to live in absence of God’s presence, Christians are to cling to Christ and live like they know him.

Sermon 7: Cooperative Generosity

The seventh sermon, “We Will Be Generous,” focused on the obligation upon members to contribute cheerfully of their efforts and resources for the advancement of the gospel mission. The theme of this sermon was taken from the statement in the church covenant, “We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. In accordance with the Biblical obligation to tithe, we will 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.” The text that was selected for this theme was 1 Cor

¹¹ The Great Commandment appears in Matt 22:39, Mark 12:31, and Luke 10:27.

16:1-4 in which the apostle Paul encourages the Corinthian church to follow the example of generosity among the Macedonian churches.

Christian generosity in the New Testament is not an issue of keeping the laws; it is an issue of stewardship in a believer's life. This generosity is not motivated by abundance; it is motivated as an expression of love and devotion to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, giving should be a continuation of commitment to Christ in every area of a believer's life. As in the case of the Macedonian churches, the less they had, the more they wanted to give, because giving took priority over keeping. For them, it was an expression of faith. Related specifically to church, generosity in giving is a discipline of cooperation that is expected of everyone to contribute.

Sermon 8: Unceasing Faithfulness

The eighth and final sermon of the series, "We Will Remain Faithful," focused on the promise of faithful and continued participation in corporate worship, regardless of geographic location, unless providentially hindered. The theme for this final sermon was taken from the statement in the church covenant, "We will endeavor, should we leave this region, to be always adjoined with a body of like-minded believers." The text chosen to conclude this series and to present this theme was Hebrews 3:1-19 in which the writer to the Hebrews asserts that all believers are a part of the house being built in Christ if they continue in faith to the end. They will not enter the rest of God, however, if found yielding to unfaithfulness.

The number of people who never become Christians because of the deceitfulness of sin is great, but also great is the number of people who give up on Christianity under the influence of sin's deceit. For those who profess Christ as their

savior, faithfulness to him must be more than simply being converted. It must be a daily, lifetime commitment to being His disciple. Therefore, believers are to stand firm in their faith. Just as Israel failed to enter into the “rest of God” in the Promised Land, those who fall away to an evil, unbelieving heart will experience that same fate. This falling away occurs when people give in to sin’s deceit. There is no certainty that giving in to sin’s deceit will not create a permanent hardness of their hearts and make them forever resistant to repentance. This regrettable outcome is particularly so if they allow themselves to be isolated from others to do all our thinking for themselves. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice;” and Proverbs 27:9 says, “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.” Therefore, believers must remain in faithful participation in worship as a constant encouragement to one another to stand firm and cling to Christ wherever the providence of God might lead them.

Phase 3: Follow-up Survey Collection and Evaluation

The next phase of the project was to evaluate the progress of the congregation in its collective understanding of the expectations of membership at Westwood Baptist Church as outlined in the church covenant and supported by Scripture. The anticipated progress from their views at the beginning of the sermon series to its conclusion would be a result of the project’s implementation. The same survey that was distributed at the beginning of the project was used as the post-series survey also. The post-series survey was limited to qualified members just as the pre-series survey had been. The post-series survey was further limited to those qualified members who had participated in the pre-series evaluation.

Once the sermon series was completed, the follow-up survey was distributed, collected and tabulated. On the week prior to the conclusion of the series, an email was distributed through the church's email database to all active and participating members requesting those who participated in the pre-series survey to pick up a post-series survey at the welcome desk. They were instructed to complete it and return it to the church office within seven days of receipt. Notices were also printed in the weekly bulletin for two consecutive weeks and announcements were made at the beginning of each gathered worship assembly two weeks following the series conclusion. There were forty-six pre-series surveys collected and tabulated at the beginning of the project. There were thirty-two post-series surveys collected and tabulated at the conclusion of the project. The results of the post-series surveys were compared to the results of the pre-series surveys and a slight positive variance was recorded overall in the church's collective view of membership expectations.¹² This phase of the project took one week to complete.

Phase 4: Sustainable Curriculum Development

The last phase of the project took two weeks to complete and concentrated on the development of an ongoing teaching guide. This guide was integrated into the membership information class that is typically held at least once per quarter. The membership information class is a required class over four-weeks for all candidates for membership. The inclusion of this guide provides all incoming member candidates with the same instruction on expectations for membership as the congregation received through the project's sermon series. Each of the thematic categories of the church covenant is explained in the context of the biblical exegesis provided. These main points

¹²See appendix 12 for the tabulated results of the post-series participant survey.

are condensed into a teaching guide and presented during session four of the four-week membership information class.¹³ The teaching guide was submitted to two members of the associate pastoral staff for evaluation. It was necessary to achieve an affirmation from them that at least 90 percent of the indicators on the rubric were at the “sufficient” or above levels before moving forward. By their assessment, each of the indicators satisfied or exceeded the “sufficient” level for content.¹⁴

Conclusion

Over the fifteen weeks of the project, members were surveyed and instructed on the expectations of membership at Westwood Baptist Church. In addition, an ongoing teaching guide was developed to ensure a sustainable understanding of membership for new members based on covenant relationship. Going into this project, the prevalent understanding of covenant relationship in membership was undeveloped, as indicated by the pre-series survey. The process of the project brought greater clarity and explanation to this structure through an eight-week sermon series. The post-series survey revealed that there was a slight increase in the knowledge and acceptance of membership expectations. Systematic use of the *Church Covenant Teaching Guide* will help ensure the knowledge of these expectations continues to be accepted among the membership.

¹³See appendix 13 for the *Church Covenant Teaching Guide*.

¹⁴See appendix 14 for a summary of the results of the pastoral evaluation of the teaching series.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This evaluation includes an examination of the purposes, goals, strengths and weaknesses of this project, as well as, proposed modifications that would further enhance its effectiveness in hindsight. As with any evaluation, certain theological and personal reflections became apparent. These will be included in the final portion of this analysis.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a covenant view of membership among the congregants at Westwood Baptist Church in Cleveland, Tennessee. This purpose was determined to be an appropriate direction for this church but also served as a corrective measure for the circumstances that developed during the difficult season of transition in the life of this congregation. As the church continued to recover from declining attendance and participation, it was hoped that the commitment to covenant relationship as a result of this project would create stability among those who remained in fellowship. This new direction proved to be a timely effort in the life of this congregation.

Establishing a covenant view of membership through this project was an appropriate endeavor for the health of the church and a necessary component to the solution for its struggles. Although it had previously maintained a stabilizing presence in the community as a strong evangelical congregation, Westwood Baptist Church was still

struggling internally to recover from changes in leadership that occurred over a period of the past ten to fifteen years. The situation had developed into uncertainty and discouragement among the membership and fostered unfounded criticism and negativity toward the church's reputation in the community. Furthermore, these changes, some of which were actually an attempt to respond to conflicts within the church, resulted in more confusion and further division. The church was in need of recovery from its internal polarization and needed the structure and confidence that developed through the acceptance of covenant relationship. Seeking to fulfill the purpose of this project introduced a paradigm of stability and has continued to restore assurance to the congregation.

The purpose of developing covenant membership was also necessary to facilitate further progress in the church. There were many difficult decisions that were made in the past that were continuing to threaten fellowship and confidence in leadership. Some of these decisions were made a few years prior to the implementation of this project and were necessary to sustain the continued vitality of the church's operations. These decisions would have been much more difficult from which to recover without the growing assurances brought on through covenant relationship among its members. Changes in leadership structure, layoffs, reductions in budgets, cancelling of programs were all inevitably necessary and would have created much more division without a legitimate and active covenant agreement coming into place. Decisions such as these, though regrettable, were necessary at the time and may be unavoidable in the future. The membership, now structured under covenant relationship, will be better postured to

withstand the stress of future actions that may otherwise be seen as a betrayal by a privileged few.

The purpose of this project in establishing covenant relationship was more about creating a new way of thinking than it was about developing a new paradigm or boundaries for interaction. In fact, a covenant had already been identified in the church's original constitution and by-laws. Therefore, the purpose was not to create a covenant but to develop a relationship based on the covenant that was already adopted. Though the intended outcome was to clarify and elevate membership expectations, it was hoped that by cultivating agreement in covenant relationship, the mentality of the congregation as a whole would shift from individuality to a more familial mindset. In doing so, the elements of the church covenant would be more deftly applied. This approach would be consistent with Paul's teaching on fulfilling the commandments: "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Rom 13:9). Thus, the purpose of the project was appropriately intended to bring a change of heart that would lead to a change of behavior, giving more allegiance to the spirit of the covenant than simply to its obligations.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The goals of the project were determined as the most appropriate means of accomplishing the project's purpose. It was necessary to identify goals that could build upon each another in order to accomplish the purpose while establishing an ongoing and sustainable benefit. The challenge in deciding which goals should be pursued was to

choose the best course of action while maintaining a proper level of simplicity. Initially, the goals being considered for this project were much more complicated and broad in application. The process of simplifying for greater effectiveness narrowed the options considerably. As God's providence would have it, however, many of the goals that were not chosen for this project were nevertheless accomplished in the process and/or as its result.

The project consisted of four goals that were intended to accomplish the project's purpose. Each of the goals that followed the first goal of assessment naturally followed as a continuation of its precedent. Beginning with the first goal, a survey was given to assess the congregation's understanding of membership expectations. The second goal was to develop a sermon series based on this assessment. This information, now in sermon format, was used to accomplish the third goal, which was to increase the knowledge of the congregation by delivering the information through sermon presentation. The series would be followed by a post-series survey to re-assess the congregation's understanding. Finally, in order to maintain the level of awareness in future generations of members, a fourth goal was created to develop a teaching guide for ongoing education in membership information classes. These goals, beginning with assessment and ending with a sustainable plan for continued application, facilitated the development of a new culture of covenant relationship at Westwood Baptist Church.

Goal 1: To Assess the Congregation's Understanding of Membership Expectations

The first goal of the project was to ascertain the position of the congregation's general mindset toward the church, its purposes and their place in its mission. A survey

based on the Likert scale was created to accomplish this goal.¹ Each question was selected by its association with at least one of the eight thematic topics taken from the church covenant.² Participants were asked to respond according to their agreement or disagreement with each statement. The desired response to each question depended on the question itself. Some questions warranted agreement while others called for disagreement. A Likert scale of 1 to 6 was used to assign points to each response. If the desired response was agreement, then a “Strongly Agrees” answer was assigned a 6 and a “Strongly Disagrees” answer was assigned a 1. Likewise, if the desired response was disagreement, then a “Strongly Disagrees” answer was assigned a 6 and a “Strongly Agrees” answer was assigned a 1. Therefore, the higher the value assigned to each answer, the stronger the participant’s understanding of covenant relationship appeared to be.

The survey became a way to give voice to the undercurrent of apparent discouragement and misunderstanding among the membership. Many who completed the survey expressed their understanding of the church’s structure and their commitment to evangelism and ministry, but also gave evidence of confusion toward the corporate nature of congregational worship and to the value of shared discipleship. One of the highest scoring responses was to question 18. It reads, “I have identified at least one spiritual gift in my life.” The question that follows reads, “It is my obligation to use my spiritual gift(s) in this church.” Participants responded with an average of 5.7 and 5.6, respectively, out of 6 possible. Their responses reveal a genuine knowledge of their obligation to others in the church. This sentiment was not consistent, however. The

¹See appendix 1 for the *Membership Assessment Survey*.

²See appendix 4 for a summary of covenant expectations.

lowest scoring question on average was question 22. It reads, “The musical portion of the worship service should be a personal time between the individual worship and God.” The desired response to this question was disagreement, affirming that while the musical portion of worship has a personal element of benefit, the ultimate intention of gathered worship is to be a time of congregational worship expression that is shared by all. Respondents scored 0.5 in their collective answers together. The disparity between this response and the previous two may not appear contradictory at first glance, but the distance of the disparity raises the level of concern to reveal a corporate confusion between the possession of a gift and the application of its use.

The distribution of the survey for assessment of these issues and others provided a good picture of the prevalent views and opinions that either needed to be affirmed or addressed for proper and biblical understanding. The results of this survey were referenced in the execution of the second goal.

Goal 2: To Develop a Sermon Series on the Biblical Elements and Covenant Expectations of Membership

The second goal was to develop a sermon series that focused on each of the thematic topics taken from the church covenant and to present these through an appropriate biblical text. The basis for each of the sermons was the continuing theme of the purpose of this project. While each of the eight sermons addressed a particular area mentioned in the covenant, the underlying message was the intentional conclusion of establishing covenant relationship among the members at Westwood Baptist Church.

The sermons were essentially topical/textual in nature. The starting point for each sermon was topical and a text was chosen that explained the topic in such a way that

could be applied to the theme without compromising the integrity of its meaning or its context. This approach proved to be the most challenging portion of this project for me personally. Since my first days of pulpit ministry, I have remained committed to expositional preaching. With few exceptions, every sermon I have preached has followed an expository outline. I have kept this same commitment since taking the pastorate at Westwood, and it has not been without difficulty. The previous pastor was committed to topical preaching, and the church had grown accustomed to this style of proclamation.

Returning to a more topically based exposition, especially for the length of time that was required to present the series, was difficult to present as well as to study. The first three years of my ministry here were the most difficult in the pulpit as the congregation struggled to learn this new disciplined presentation. As other pastors have said, the discipline of expository preaching is not only a discipline for the preacher but for the church as well. I worried that altering the expository method that the congregation had become accustomed to would undermine the progress that had been gained among them. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, it was difficult to train myself to study. I remained constantly worried that I might force a meaning upon the text for the purpose of the topic, and that I would impose a point that was either out of context or wrong completely. Nevertheless, I located texts that were appropriate for each topic. Once these were identified, I focused on developing them exegetically for textual delivery, and they progressed as desired.

There were many benefits to developing the sermon series despite my own difficulties. Waiting for the results of the surveys allowed me to address particular areas of misunderstanding as I prepared the sermon outlines. In fact, in some cases, in light of

the data from the surveys, a scriptural text that had far more application to the specific circumstances of the congregation replaced the text that had been originally considered for the topic. This method turned out to be very beneficial in my preparation and delivery.

Goal 3: To Increase the Knowledge of the Congregation by Preaching the Sermon Series

The goal that followed was to actually deliver the sermons that had been prepared in the second goal so that the knowledge of the congregation would be increased in its understanding and acceptance of covenant relationship in membership. Just as the second goal was the most difficult for me personally, the third goal was the most rewarding. Once the sermon outlines were developed with the appropriate text, I began with an explanation of the series and a brief introduction to each of the upcoming topics.

Each of the sermons was presented to show the congregation the mistakes of churches in the New Testament and to offer a solution with biblical admonishment and/or exhortation that might be learned from their situation. The first sermon, from 1 Cor 1:10-17, titled “Same Team, Same Cause,” addressed the issue of unity. This topic has been a misunderstood and misapplied theme in Westwood’s recent history. The tensions in the church had resulted in the dismissal of one staff member who was in opposition to the pastor and then the resignation of the pastor himself one year later. The almost immediate plea that permeated the pulpit became the cry for unity. Unfortunately, it seems that the interpretation of the need for unity was not always biblically applied. Instead, the pulpit became a place to proclaim personal agendas by some misguided and misinformed guests. As a result, the issue of unity became an issue of divisiveness itself.

Therefore, it was necessary to establish a solid introduction for covenant relationship prior to beginning the text.

The first, and the rest of the sermons that followed, were received well by the majority of those who attended the worship assemblies. The series began in November and concluded in January. Many people expressed their appreciation for the messages and for the effort that was becoming evident to the congregation. The sermon series proved to be very effective as a tool of communication to the whole church family at the same time. Although there were guests and nominal attenders present, the information was not presented without application to all, as the Scriptures naturally command.

Goal 4: To Develop a Teaching Guide for Use in Ongoing Membership Classes

The final goal of this project was to develop a teaching guide for use in the ongoing membership classes.³ The purpose for this goal is to create a sustainable means of education that instructs all new members on the expectations of membership as outlined in the church covenant. The reason this method is so crucial to the project is because of the common failure among organizations that have established guidelines but have no means of upholding these standards for future generations. For the church, the loss of this information could occur as easily as a few weeks without some form of constant presentation.

This guide has now been integrated into Westwood's four-week membership information class. The class meets as the need requires, which is typically once every quarter. This class is one of five requirements that must be fulfilled in order to be

³See appendix 13 for the *Church Covenant Teaching Guide*.

presented to the congregation as a candidate for membership. This presentation comes as a recommendation from the pastors who lead this class. The teaching guide covers all eight themes of the church covenant and is presented in the introduction of the final session. Every prospective member that completes this class will receive the same teaching that the current membership has received. The only exceptions will be the length of the material and the context for its presentation. To that point, the context for this material being presented may actually prove to be more effective in ways that the sermon proclamation was unable to accomplish. The opportunity for dialogue and questions in the small group setting will further enhance the understanding of covenant relationship as it is applied to the membership expectations at Westwood Baptist Church.

Strengths of the Project

The strengths of this project centered around two goals that were successfully carried out. Both involved the communication aspect of the project. The first was the delivery of the covenant expectations to the active and participating membership through the sermon series. The second was the development of the *Church Covenant Teaching Guide* for ongoing membership information classes.

The sermons were crucial to the success of this project. They were the primary means by which the information could be disseminated and was the most appropriate venue available. The use of the pulpit gave credibility to the subject matter as a definitive direction for our congregation to move toward. The selection of the texts that supported the themes in the Covenant was easily applied to the overarching purpose of developing covenant relationship among the members. By proclaiming to all who

attended, the message was communicated for all to hear. Furthermore, those who were not members were able to witness the cooperative effort being pursued.

The other strength was the teaching guide. The only way to have any sense of confidence in the lasting presence of the benefits in this project is to have a sustainable plan in place that will continue to perpetuate these principles. This guide will do exactly that. By implementing this teaching into the ongoing membership information classes, every new member will begin their membership with the understanding that they are entering into a covenant relationship. They will be reminded that membership has privileges as well as expectations. This addition should prove to be one of the greatest strengths of this project.

Weaknesses of the Project

The weaknesses of the project involved the survey and the tabulation of the data. While the survey was very valuable, it did not give a complete assessment of the congregation's attitudes related to the themes of the Covenant. One reason was the difficulty in distributing and collecting the survey itself. With over five hundred people, trying to communicate the directions and intentions of a survey can be difficult to say the least. Utilizing the email distribution and announcements through the bulletin and platform granted some provision, but this exposure was limited at best. Even though the anticipated participation was achieved, it was such a small and random selection of the congregation that the data gathered must still be approached as incomplete.

Another weakness was the information available to tabulate the data. The surveys were submitted anonymously, meaning that the post-series surveys could not be matched to the same participant's pre-series survey. This dilemma was an irresolvable

issue once the pre-series surveys were already distributed, especially under the circumstances available for distribution. Nevertheless, it would have been very beneficial to have the ability to match these surveys for individual comparison.

Proposed Modifications

If given the opportunity to repeat this project, I would do a number of things differently. First of all, the project should be extended beyond the fifteen-week window. This extension would allow for a better selection of participants to be surveyed and would give more time for tabulation of the data before having to integrate it into the sermon series. This change would also give more time to devote to sermon preparation.

Second, the survey questions should be modified and include a line for comments. Many of the questions in the survey were generic at best. While the intention of the questions was clear to me when creating the survey, the respondents may not have fully grasped some of their meaning. Some of the survey participants made comments in the lines between the questions. Many of these were actually helpful in discerning whether or not the respondent truly understood the point of the question. Other comments revealed a clear theological misunderstanding. It would be helpful to have these comments organized with the questions that they pertain to.

Third, although being able to communicate the information in the pulpit was a strength of the project, it would have been helpful to supplement this study through weekly small group studies that met concurrent with the series. Sunday School classes would have been a great venue, as would have been the midweek discipleship classes. The teaching guide that was developed for the ongoing membership class could be used

for this purpose as well, with additional teaching resources added. Discussion questions could be added to each week's theme and a devotional guide included for daily prayer.

Theological Reflections

Throughout the progress of this project, a number of theological reflections came to light. Many of them were focused on the nature of covenant for obvious reasons. Some of them became apparent as a conspicuous part of the ongoing work of God's providence. The timing of this project was virtually impeccable from a human perspective looking backwards. These reflections are about the nature of the local church, the divine credibility of covenant relationship, and the intentional purpose of God's providence in the church.

The first theological reflection is that God's church is a fellowship of believers that is gathered for the purpose of community, cooperation, and accountability. Contrary to some contemporary thought, the church is not a venue of entertainment masked in weekend piety. Furthermore, it is not a place for ego building or flexing. The church is an organism that is most beautiful in its humility and diversity. It is a place of unified affection for Christ, from whom this unity is granted. It is not a place to espouse all opinions. It is, instead, a place to proclaim the whole counsel of the absolute truth. It is, therefore, the place and the people who gather for the purpose of shared community and cooperation in living lives that glorify the reputation of God in Christ.

The second theological reflection is that God has established a pattern of dealing with his people through covenant relationship. Therefore, this paradigm should be an appropriate pattern for his people to follow as well. His first relationship to humanity was to establish his conditional covenant with humanity in the paradise of

Eden. This relationship is how God has dealt with people since then. He has established covenants to define the nature and the boundaries of his intentional relationship to those he has created. These covenants were sometimes corrective and sometimes unprovoked, but they were always established to accomplish his purposes and to clarify the boundaries of expectations. If the church is to be effective in fulfilling the purposes for which it is intended, the appropriate means by which boundaries of expectation and privilege are expressed should be clarified through covenant relationship. Covenant is nothing new to God, nor to humanity. It is not a challenge to grace. It is not an element of salvation. It is the means of relationship among Christians who work and live together as they await his return.

The third theological reflection is that God allows his people to experience trials and adversity to lead them into a greater desire for his presence and understanding of his purposes, including church communities. The journey on which Westwood Baptist Church has been is one that many have declared a judgment of God's displeasure. This conclusion is false and the opposite is true. Just as God's purposes were revealed in the life of Job, so this providence can be seen in the experience of Westwood. As Job listens to God's rebuke of his narcissistic grumble, he realizes the purpose for his suffering. The man who was righteous above all others in the land, who lost everything, declares this bold proclamation in Job 42:5, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." God used affliction in Job's life to take him to a deeper place of relationship to himself. God will work this way in churches also. He may have done so in Westwood Baptist Church.

Personal Reflections

A greater clarity of the expectations of membership at Westwood Baptist Church and an appreciation for the covenant itself have developed. I began reading the church covenant at the beginning of each member's meeting when I was first called as the senior pastor, and as a consequence, appointed as the moderator of these meetings. Until this project was implemented, the reading of the Covenant was seen by many as an exercise of parliamentary procedure.⁴ Teaching through the church covenant and presenting its significance through the means of this project has elevated its importance for all of the membership to notice and they have begun to pay attention to its content. In doing so, they are beginning to realize that its statements apply to each one individually as members of the whole; members who are called to worship together in covenant relationship. They now know what to expect of each other and what is expected of them. When an issue of division developed recently that had been handled improperly in the past, there was grounds for correction and a means for directing the two parties to resolution.

The sense of community and belonging that has developed is inherently present in covenant relationship. The journey through the goals of this project provided healing for some who felt that they had a lesser part in the community of the church. The sermons helped them to see that the functions of the church were to be a contribution by all, and that each person had a role to fulfill. While this truth had been communicated in

⁴When I led the members through the reading of the covenant at the first members meeting, it became obvious that many were either unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the practice. I paused and asked how many were familiar with the Westwood church covenant. Eleven of approximately 150 people raised their hands. I then asked how many of them knew Westwood Baptist Church even had a church covenant. Twenty-six people, fewer than 17 percent of those members in attendance acknowledged knowing it existed.

biblical exposition before, its presentation in this context was given as somewhat of a movement in which they could be included; a purpose of which they could be a part. The idea of their participation seemed to encourage their contribution as a necessary component to achieving a goal that could be shared by all. Everyone may not share this sentiment yet, but there is a growing sense of belonging among the congregation that had been forgotten. This project breathed new life into this community of faith.

A seriousness is beginning to develop among our members who now have a renewed sense of their belonging. Some of the events that have taken place in the past may have been interpreted as nonsensical or juvenile. While joy and lightheartedness now thrive among the congregation, a growing attitude of burden and responsibility is occurring. The clarity of purpose in worship and proclamation that this project brought to the membership has invited further opportunities to be sought out to engage the lost with the gospel and to minister in prayer and deed. The persistent call to unified affections and brotherly love, and the obligation to embrace these fundamentals, has invited greater depth to relationships. The richness of these relationships and the confidence that they can enjoy with each other has encouraged accountability partnerships to develop, discipleship groups to form, and a renewed excitement for evangelism and missions.

Conclusion

Westwood Baptist Church has been blessed by the journey through which God has led them these past fifteen years. The story of this project is more than a requirement for a doctoral degree. The story of this project is about a church that was crippled by unexpected loss, struggled to find its way again, and is now beginning to realize that it was never lost in the providential care of God. God, who has shown mercy and kindness

to his elect, has done so by establishing the covenants of his promises. Likewise, the membership of Westwood Baptist Church, who are a gathering of his elect, have covenanted among themselves to be faithful, just as he is always faithful. I believe Westwood Baptist Church will be a better community of faith because of this project, poised for the next fifteen years and beyond to do its part in fulfilling the Great Commission and honoring the Great Commandment, awaiting Christ's return – together.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERSHIP ASSESSMENT SURVEY

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE
TO BE COMPLETED BY CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate your overall understanding of expectations for members at Westwood Baptist Church. This research is being conducted by Steven Harold Smartt for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions at the beginning of this project and then you will be asked to answer the same questions at its conclusion. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Directions: Answer the following questions by giving your opinion based on the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

1. My most significant relationships are with fellow Christians at Westwood Baptist Church.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

2. God provides abundant resources to certain individuals for the purpose of giving to others.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

3. Each member has an obligation to help provide for the material needs of other members when a need is present.
- SD D DS AS A SA
4. I have an obligation to confront and correct other Christians every time I discover them sinning.
- SD D DS AS A SA
5. It is important to belong to a church through membership.
- SD D DS AS A SA
6. There are other proper ways to publicly declare our salvation in lieu of water baptism.
- SD D DS AS A SA
7. I have social times with church members outside of church activities.
- SD D DS AS A SA
8. I intentionally establish relationships with unchurched people for the purpose of sharing the gospel.
- SD D DS AS A SA
9. I believe that one of the purposes of small groups, such as Sunday School classes, is to bring others to Christ.
- SD D DS AS A SA
10. Every Christian is obligated to personally share their faith with others.
- SD D DS AS A SA
11. The church's primary focus is evangelism not prayer or teaching.
- SD D DS AS A SA
12. The sending of missionaries is critically important for sharing the Gospel.
- SD D DS AS A SA

13. I regularly pray for my friends, relatives, and co-workers who do not yet know Christ, that they will come to faith.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. I believe the Bible teaches that I should give at least 10 percent of my income to the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. Worship in the church is designed to reach our community with the Gospel.

SD D DS AS A SA

16. The musical ministry of the church should expect all attendees to participate rather than observe.

SD D DS AS A SA

17. The Holy Bible is the sole authority for my Christian beliefs and daily decisions.

SD D DS AS A SA

18. I have identified at least one spiritual gift in my life.

SD D DS AS A SA

19. It is my obligation to use my spiritual gift(s) in this church.

SD D DS AS A SA

20. Sunday School and other small group bible studies are important in encouraging me to grow spiritually.

SD D DS AS A SA

21. It is important to have someone in my church that I can talk to about personal problems/issues.

SD D DS AS A SA

22. The musical portion of the worship service should be a personal time between the individual worshiper and God.

SD D DS AS A SA

23. My relationship with God has a transforming influence in my family, work and social life.

SD D DS AS A SA

24. My lifestyle is significantly different than the lifestyle of an unbeliever.

SD D DS AS A SA

25. I understand the biblical model of church discipline but do not see it as applicable in today's church.

SD D DS AS A SA

26. I strive to be a good steward of the resources God has entrusted to me.

SD D DS AS A SA

27. I believe that giving my time, talent and money is a necessary part of the Christian life.

SD D DS AS A SA

28. Careless words contribute to negative feelings toward the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

29. It is part of my membership responsibilities to volunteer my time to serve in areas of my church's ministries.

SD D DS AS A SA

30. I have an obligation to serve my community outside of Westwood Baptist Church.

SD D DS AS A SA

31. It should be a priority for our church to minister to families in crisis.

SD D DS AS A SA

32. I have responsibilities to support and serve our pastors and ministry staff.

SD D DS AS A SA

33. Conflict should be publicly confronted when it arises within the church family.

SD D DS AS A SA

34. It's important for every opinion to be heard on issues of faith and doctrine.

SD D DS AS A SA

35. Church members should be equipped and growing to become leaders.

SD D DS AS A SA

36. I expect God to act in my life through the ministry of Westwood Baptist Church.

SD D DS AS A SA

37. I consider church participation to be one of the most important activities of my life and future.

SD D DS AS A SA

38. Sunday School should be more socially oriented than rigorous teaching.

SD D DS AS A SA

39. I am able to drink an alcoholic beverage in the privacy of my own home regardless of who might discover my actions.

SD D DS AS A SA

40. I am responsible for helping maintain peace and for promoting reconciliation in my church.

SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

CURRENT WESTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH COVENANT

Having, as we trust, been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to surrender ourselves to Him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

We will endeavor to rear those that may be under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor to bear, with tenderness and sympathy, each other's burdens and sorrows; To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. In accordance with the Biblical obligation to tithe, we will 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.

We will endeavor, should we leave this region, to be always adjoined with a body of like-minded believers.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

APPENDIX 3

PREVIOUS WESTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour,

And on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,

We do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, enter into a covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness and comfort;

To promote its prosperity and spirituality; 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.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances;

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 and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love;

To remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech;

To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible, unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

APPENDIX 4

COVENANT EXPECTATIONS SUMMARY

Unified Affections – Biblical membership in the local church calls for a culture of one accord in purpose and affections.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Brotherly Love - Biblical membership in the church requires concern for each other's well-being and spiritual growth.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.

Congregational Worship – Biblical membership in the church calls for consistent participation in corporate worship.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

Biblical Discipleship – Biblical membership in the church requires a commitment to build Christian homes that are inclined to encourage each family member's heart toward the Gospel.

We will endeavor to rear those that may be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

Harmonious Relationships – Biblical membership in the church calls for the pursuit of peace and reconciliation through all areas of daily living.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor to bear, with tenderness and sympathy, each other's burdens and sorrows; To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

Genuine Witness – Biblical membership in the church requires attention be given to cultural proscriptions that might challenge the validity of the Gospel testimony.

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

Cooperative Generosity – Biblical membership in the church requires cheerful contribution of efforts and resources for the advancement of the Gospel mission.
We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. In accordance with the Biblical obligation to tithe, we will 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.

Unceasing Faithfulness – Biblical membership in the church requires faithful and continued participation through worship.
We will endeavor, should we leave this region, to be always adjoined with a body of like-minded believers.

APPENDIX 5

SURVEY EVALUATION RUBRICS

Table A1. Rubric for desired response of strongly agree for survey questions

Question	SD 1	D 2	DS 3	AS 4	A 5	SA 6	Response Weight
1							
2							
3							
5							
7							
8							
9							
10							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							
19							
20							
21							
23							
24							
26							
27							
28							
29							
30							
31							
32							
35							
36							
37							

40							
							Total

Table A2. Rubric for desired response of strongly disagree for survey questions

Question	SD 6	D 5	DS 4	AS 3	A 2	SA 1	Response Weight
4							
6							
11							
22							
25							
33							
34							
38							
39							
							Total

APPENDIX 6

SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

Covenant Sermon Series and Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Sermon # - Topic					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.					
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 7

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND DESIRED RESPONSES

Question Number	Expectation Addressed	Desired Response
1	Unity	AGREE
2	Generosity	AGREE
3	Testimony	AGREE
4	Brotherly Love	DISAGREE
5	Faithfulness	AGREE
6	Testimony	DISAGREE
7	Unity	AGREE
8	Discipleship	AGREE
9	Discipleship	AGREE
10	Discipleship	AGREE
11	Discipleship	DISAGREE
12	Discipleship	AGREE
13	Discipleship	AGREE
14	Generosity	AGREE
15	Corporate Worship	AGREE
16	Corporate Worship	AGREE
17	Testimony	AGREE
18	Testimony	AGREE
19	Unity	AGREE
20	Corporate Worship	AGREE
21	Brotherly Love	AGREE
22	Discipleship	DISAGREE
23	Testimony	AGREE
24	Testimony	AGREE
25	Harmony	DISAGREE
26	Brotherly Love	AGREE
27	Generosity	AGREE
28	Brotherly Love	AGREE
29	Generosity	AGREE
30	Generosity	AGREE
31	Brotherly Love	AGREE
32	Unity	AGREE
33	Harmony	DISAGREE

34	Harmony	DISAGREE
35	Unity	AGREE
36	Faithfulness	AGREE
37	Faithfulness	AGREE
38	Discipleship	DISAGREE
39	Testimony	DISAGREE
40	Harmony	AGREE

APPENDIX 8

TABULATED RESULTS OF
PRE-SERIES SURVEY

Table A3. Actual responses to pre-series survey questions

Question	SD 1	D 2	DS 3	AS 4	A 5	SA 6	Response Average	Response Desired
1		1	4	10	15	16	4.9	A
2	1	1	1	5	16	22	5.2	A
3				3	19	24	5.5	A
4	3	9	10	13	7	4	3.5	D
5				3	15	28	5.5	A
6	10	13	5	11	5	2	4.1	D
7		1	1	4	27	13	5.1	A
8		4	8	11	18	5	4.3	A
9		10	6	5	19	6	4.1	A
10			1	1	14	30	5.6	A
11	6	15	9	8	3	5	4.0	D
12			2	5	21	18	5.2	A
13			2	6	27	11	5.0	A
14		1	3	1	10	31	5.5	A
15	5	9	5	13	12	2	3.5	A
16		7	8	7	13	11	4.3	A
17				1	8	37	5.8	A
18					14	32	5.7	A
19				1	14	31	5.7	A
20					10	36	5.8	A
21		1		16	11	18	5.0	A
22		5	4	12	18	7	2.6	D
23					17	29	5.6	A
24				3	24	19	5.3	A
25	15	12	7	5	6	1	4.5	D
26				3	21	22	5.4	A
27				3	11	32	5.6	A
28				1	13	32	5.7	A

Table A3 – Continued

29				2	18	26	5.5	A
30				9	24	13	5.1	A
31				6	17	23	5.4	A
32				2	18	26	5.5	A
33	4	10	14	10	6	2	3.8	D
34	7	20		10	6	3	4.1	D
35			1	2	18	25	5.5	A
36			2	11	16	17	5.0	A
37			1	5	19	21	5.3	A
38	12	20	8	5	1		4.8	D
39	19	14	7	4	1	1	4.9	D
40				4	15	27	5.5	A

APPENDIX 9

SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon 1 **“Same Team, Same Cause”** **1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

An exposition of First Corinthians 1:10-17 will support united affections by showing that biblical membership in the local church calls for a culture of one accord in purpose and affections. In this passage, members of the church are urged to avoid quarrels and competition that only serve to divide and conquer. The church is given men and women who use their individual giftings for the greater good of the whole. It concludes with Paul’s commission to preach the Gospel. The text reminds us that neither our methods nor our goals should be in competition with God’s purpose and glory. We are to see our role and the role of others as instrumental in accomplishing God’s plan for his church.

- I. Our Culture of Peace
- II. Our Commitment to One
- III. Our Commission to Proclaim

Sermon 2 **“The Prerequisite to Unity”** **Romans 12:3-14**

An exposition of Romans 12:3-14 will support brotherly love by showing that biblical membership in the church requires loving concern for each other’s well being

and spiritual growth. Living in an environment that fosters genuine and subjective love for other church members is part of covenant relationship. As we commit ourselves to love each other in truth and through good deeds, we help each other grow in our commitment Christ.

- I. We See Everyone with Dignity and Purpose (vv3-5).
- II. We Use Our Gifts for the Benefit of Others (6-8).
- III. We Make the Effort to Live Together Well (9-14).

Sermon 3
“The Necessity of Gathered Worship”
Hebrews 10:24-25

An exposition of Hebrews 10:24-25 will support corporate worship by showing that biblical membership in the church calls for consistent participation in congregational worship. Drawing near to God and holding fast to our hope is done in the fellowship of a covenant community. The text reminds us that as we come to worship God, we also gather to encourage each other and spur one another on to good works. A purpose of the church gathered is for mutual edification.

- I. To “Stir Up One Another”
- II. To “Encourage One Another”
 - a. Shared Warmth
 - b. Mutual Encouragement
 - c. Maturing Faith
 - d. Humble Submission
 - e. Joyful Hope

Sermon 4
“Our Homes Will Be Christian”
Ephesians 6:1-4

An exposition of Ephesians 6:1-4 will support biblical discipleship by showing that biblical membership in the church requires a commitment to build Christian homes that are inclined to encourage each family member’s heart toward the Gospel. Corporate worship is a continuation of the lifestyles we live in our homes and community. Consequently, living in covenant membership extends beyond the worship gathering and into the way we build and shape our families toward faithful obedience.

- I. Teach Them To Obey (v1)
- II. Teach Them To Respect (v2)
- III. Teach Them Reward By Merit (v3)
- IV. Become A Model For Justice, Gentleness, and Honor (v4a)
- V. Cultivate Their Hearts Toward God (v4b)

Sermon 5
“We Will Live In Harmony”
Ephesians 4:25-32

An exposition of Ephesians 4:25-32 will support harmonious relationships by showing that biblical membership in the church calls for the pursuit of peace and reconciliation through all areas of daily living. This requires us to think and act in ways that model moral behavior. This leads us to honor God in the way we treat others. The way we treat others reflects our relationship with God and should be a reflection of his presence among us.

- I. Honesty That Loves (v25)
- II. Prudence That Resolves (vv26-27)

- III. Generosity That Contributes (v28)
- IV. Words That Build (v29)

Sermon 6
“We Will Preserve Our Witness”
Romans 13:8-14

An exposition of Romans 13:8-14 will support the call for a genuine witness by showing that biblical membership in the church requires attention be given to cultural proscriptions that might challenge the validity of the Gospel testimony. As Christians living in covenant community, we have liberty, but it should not be exploited for our own benefit. Honoring Christ may require forfeiting personal privileges for the greater witness of purity.

- I. Be Honest With Unbelievers
- II. Be Loving
- III. Be A Light
- IV. Behave Differently
- V. Be Covered In Christ

Sermon 7
“We Will Be Generous”
1 Corinthians 16:1-4

An exposition of First Corinthians 16:1-4 will support cooperative generosity by showing that biblical membership in the church requires cheerful contribution of efforts and resources for the advancement of the Gospel mission. The text instructs us to be generous as a standard for all Christians. Generosity in supporting the ministry of the Church should be a priority, a discipline, and a regular act of worship.

- I. We Give Out Of Love
- II. We Give Individually
- III. We Give Corporately
- IV. We Give Generously

Sermon 8
“We Will Remain Faithful”
Hebrews 3:1-19

An exposition of First Corinthians 12:12-27 will support unceasing faithfulness by showing that biblical membership in the church requires faithful and continued participation through worship. Maintaining unity in the body requires us to recognize the value of each individual part. The text reminds us that all Christians have a spiritual gift to contribute and that no Christian should avoid or be prevented from participating in worship.

- I. We Are A Part If We Continue (vv1-12)
 - a. Many Are Deceived
 - b. Many Give Up
- II. We Will Not Rest If We Yield (vv13-19)
 - a. Faithfulness Is More Than Conversion
 - b. Faithfulness Is A Lifetime Commitment

APPENDIX 10

RAW PASTORAL EVALUATION DATA

Table A4. Actual responses to pastoral evaluations
for the sermon series

Sermon #1 - Unified Affections					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				12	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				12	4
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					4

Table A4 – Continued

Sermon #2 - Brotherly Love					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	8	3.66
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				12	4
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					3.88

Sermon #3 - Congregational Worship					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				12	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				12	4
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					4

Table A4 – Continued

Sermon #4 - Biblical Discipleship					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.			3	8	3.66
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				12	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				12	4
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					3.88

Sermon #5 - Harmonious Relationships					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.			3	8	3.66
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	8	3.66
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	8	3.66
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.			3	8	3.66
					3.63

Table A4 – Continued

Sermon #6 - Genuine Witness					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				12	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	8	3.66
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					3.88

Sermon #7 - Cooperative Generosity					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				12	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				12	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				12	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				12	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	8	3.66
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					3.88

Table A4 – Continued

Sermon #8 - Unceasing Faithfulness					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.			3	8	3.66
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				12	4
The material is theologically sound.				12	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.			3	8	3.66
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.			3	8	3.66
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	8	3.66
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	8	3.66
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				12	4
					3.79

Table A5. Actual responses to pastoral evaluations
for the teaching series

Topic #1 - Unified Affections					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				8	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			6		3
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.88

Table A5 – Continued

Topic #2 - Brotherly Love					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.			6		3
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.			3	4	3.5
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	4	3.5
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	4	3.5
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.69

Topic #3 - Congregational Worship					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	4	3.5
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	4	3.5
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.88

Table A5 – Continued

Topic #4 - Biblical Discipleship					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.			6		3
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			3	4	3.5
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	4	3.5
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.75

Topic #5 - Harmonious Relationships					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			6		3
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			6		3
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.			3	4	3.5
					3.69

Table A5 – Continued

Topic #6 - Genuine Witness					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				8	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			3	4	3.5
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.94

Topic #7 - Cooperative Generosity					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.				8	4
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.				8	4
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				8	4
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					4

Table A5 – Continued

Topic #8 - Unceasing Faithfulness					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Average /2
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of topic among the members of the church.			6		3
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the subject.				8	4
The material is theologically sound.				8	4
The thesis of the sermon/lesson is clearly stated.				8	4
The points of the sermon/lesson clearly support the thesis.				8	4
The sermon/lesson contains points of practical application.			6		3
The sermon/lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.			6		3
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.				8	4
					3.63

APPENDIX 11

PASTORAL STAFF SERMON SERIES EVALUATION

Covenant Sermon Series and Curriculum Evaluation Tool		
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary		
Sermon	Required Cumulative is 2.7 to satisfy 90% goal	Cumulative
Sermon 1 - United Affections		4
Sermon 2 - Brotherly Love		3.88
Sermon 3 - Congregational Worship		4
Sermon 4 - Biblical Discipleship		3.88
Sermon 5 - Harmonious Relationships		3.63
Sermon 6 - Genuine Witness		3.88
Sermon 7 - Cooperative Generosity		3.88
Sermon 8 - Unceasing Faithfulness		3.79

APPENDIX 12

TABULATED RESULTS OF
POST-SERIES SURVEY

Table A6. Actual responses to post-series questions and post-series variance

Q#	SD 1	D 2	DS 3	AS 4	A 5	SA 6	Average Response	Post-Series Variance
1				3	14	15	5.4	0.5
2		1			20	11	5.3	0.0
3	1			1	14	16	5.3	-0.2
4	2	11	5	3	8	3	3.6	0.1
5					10	22	5.7	0.2
6	10	11	1	2	3	5	4.3	0.2
7			1	2	17	12	5.3	0.2
8		1	1	8	17	5	4.8	0.5
9		3	1	4	16	8	4.8	0.7
10					10	22	5.7	0.1
11	4	13	1	4	6	4	3.8	-0.2
12		1			17	14	5.3	0.1
13			1	1	17	13	5.3	0.3
14	1	3	1	1	11	15	5.0	-0.5
15	1	4	4	1	12	10	4.5	1.0
16	1	1	1	2	18	9	4.9	0.6

Table A6 – Continued

17					9	23	5.7	-0.1
18					12	20	5.6	-0.1
19		1			9	22	5.6	-0.1
20				1	11	20	5.6	-0.2
21		1		5	15	11	5.1	0.1
22	2	8	5	5	4	8	3.2	0.6
23					15	17	5.5	-0.1
24				1	14	17	5.5	0.2
25	8	17	2	1	3	1	4.7	0.2
26					16	16	5.5	0.1
27					9	23	5.7	0.1
28					14	18	5.6	-0.1
29				1	12	19	5.6	0.1
30				3	16	13	5.3	0.2
31				2	16	14	5.4	0.0
32					16	16	5.5	0.0
33	2	12	6	3	5	4	3.7	-0.1
34	3	14	3	4	3	5	3.8	-0.3
35			1	3	17	11	5.2	-0.3
36			1	3	13	15	5.3	0.3
37				2	13	17	5.5	0.2
38	7	11	6	4	2	2	4.3	-0.5
39	15	12	2		2	1	5.1	0.2
40				1	13	18	5.5	0.0

0.19

APPENDIX 13

CHURCH COVENANT TEACHING GUIDE

Topic

1. UNIFIED AFFECTIONS – “WE WILL LIVE IN UNITY” (1 COR 1:10-17)

“We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

- A. Biblical unity is not sameness but is a commitment to share together in common affection, specifically our love and response in faith to Jesus Christ.
- B. The issue in Corinth that necessitated this admonition from Paul was the division that had developed among them in their allegiance to particular men.
 - 1. Rather than setting their affections in one accord, they were choosing leaders of their own kind based on their preferential assessment of who had the better grasp of truth.
 - 2. Paul rebukes this polarization of loyalties and insists that each of their chosen leaders was an instrument to be used by the only one who was truly capable of uniting them in life.
 - 3. He contends that it is Christ alone that merits their affections and it is Christ alone that is to be their delight.

Topic

C. Any other placement of affection on an individual man is not only unwarranted but would be a contradiction of that man's purpose in fulfilling the Great Commission.

2. BROTHERLY LOVE – “WE WILL LOVE EACH OTHER”
(ROM 12:3-14)

“We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.”

A. The call to unified affections must be precipitated by a balanced relationship to God and each other among the church family.

B. Having established the necessity of our relationship to God in the preceding verses, the apostle Paul continues urges believers to view others with dignity and to recognize that each person has value and purpose in the ministry of the church.

1. He makes this point by recognizing specific gifts that are granted to individuals for the edification of the whole congregation.

2. These gifts are not intended to be simply utilitarian in nature but are to be devotions by which we express our love for one another.

C. Believers are to make an effort to live together well in the church, in genuine affection, by serving one another with the gift(s) that God has distributed.

3. CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP – “WE WILL GATHER FOR WORSHIP”
(HEB 10:24-25)

“We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.”

A. Christianity is communal in nature and every pursuit in the Christian life is to be done in the context of community.

B. There are two priorities from this text that we are to acknowledge in our commitment to gather.

1. We are to “stir up one another,” and we are to “encourage one another.” Both of these are facilitated in the priority of congregational worship.

a. To “stir up one another” is to motivate each other in our Christian devotion and to stimulate expression of love and good works in each other’s lives.

b. Likewise, to “encourage one another” is to provide timely comfort and assurance.

2. Both of these are to be done to “one another.”

a. These are not individual exercises.

b. They can only be done in the context of community.

4. BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP – “OUR HOMES WILL BE CHRISTIAN”
(EPH 6:1-4)

Topic

“We will endeavor to rear those that may be under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.”

- A. Children are to be taught obedience to their parents by their parents; it is the parent’s responsibility.
- B. Parents are to teach their children to obey and to honor them by teaching them respect.
- C. The best way to instill this respect into them is for parents to model such a respect for their own parents.
 - 1. Children should learn to honor their parents through expressions of love and devotion, and by providing care for them for as long and as often as is needed.
 - 2. Our children should learn to obey with honor and respect by the way their parents live their own personal lives as an example to them.
- D. The unique role of the father is to lead his family to Christ by leading them and by teaching them with a nurturing temperament.
- E. Parents can become a model for justice, gentleness and honor, cultivating their hearts toward the gospel.

5. HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS – “WE WILL LIVE IN HARMONY”
(EPH 4:25-32)

Topic

“We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor to bear, with tenderness and sympathy, each other's burdens and sorrows; To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.”

- A. The way we treat other Christians, specifically those in our church family, bears an evident reflection of our relationship to God.
- B. Paul makes this point by continuing his theme of submission.
 - 1. He first reminds them of what kind of people Christians are to be and then establishes that, out of this new nature, believers are to live in harmony with each other.
 - 2. The text teaches that believers are to be honest with one another and to not deceive.
- C. Deception only serves to convince others that things are not as they seem.
 - 1. This type of deceit results in pretentiousness that builds walls as we mislead one another.
 - 2. Duplicity is a reflection of our relationship to God.
 - 3. As John wrote, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”¹
- D. We are to be honest and careful about misguided words and emotions that will fester and will not heal.

¹1 John 1:8

Topic

- E. When walls are built through deception, truth will become relative to individual benefit; words and treatment of others will become corrupt.
- F. This can be avoided by surrendering our motives and emotions to the Holy Spirit and being kind to one another.

6. GENUINE WITNESS – “WE WILL PRESERVE OUR WITNESS”
(ROM 13:8-14).

“We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.”

- A. One of the easiest ways to offend nonbelievers is to cheat them or to do them harm under a pretense of virtue, which may or may not be intentional.
- B. Paul makes his point in his letter to the Romans.
 - 1. Indifference to morality is why Paul says that we are to obligate ourselves to loving others by paying our debts and refusing to do them harm.
 - 2. Referring to the commandments, Paul declares that each of the laws are summed up in the Great Commandment
- C. We have a divine command to love others in order to influence the world in a positive light.

Topic

- D. We are to lay aside the deeds of darkness and live different, better lives than those in the world, covering ourselves in Christ and allowing no opportunity for sin.
- E. To a world that wants to live in absence of God's presence, we are to cling to Christ and live like we know him.

7. COOPERATIVE GENEROSITY – “WE WILL BE GENEROUS”
(1 COR 16:1-4).

“We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. In accordance with the Biblical obligation to tithe, we will 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. Christian generosity in the New Testament is not an issue of keeping the laws; it is an issue of stewardship in a believer's life.
- B. This generosity is not motivated by abundance; it is motivated as an expression of love and devotion to Jesus Christ.
- C. Paul instructs the Corinthians that giving should be a continuation of commitment to Christ in every area of a believer's life.
 - 1. As in the case of the Macedonian churches, the less they had, the more they wanted to give, because giving took priority over keeping.
 - 2. For them, it was an expression of faith.

D. Related specifically to church, generosity in giving is a discipline of cooperation that is expected of everyone to contribute.

8. UNCEASING FAITHFULNESS – “WE WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL”
(HEB 3:1-19).

“We will endeavor, should we leave this region, to be always adjoined with a body of like-minded believers.”

- A. The number of people who never become Christians because of the deceitfulness of sin is great, but also great is the number of people who give up on Christianity under the influence of sin’s deceit.
- B. For those who profess Christ as their savior, faithfulness to him must be more than simply being converted.
- C. Faithfulness must be a daily, lifetime commitment to being His disciple.
- D. Believers are to stand firm in their faith.
 - 1. Just as Israel failed to enter into the “rest of God” in the Promised Land, those who fall away to an evil, unbelieving heart will experience that same fate.
 - 2. This falling away occurs when people give in to sin’s deceit.
- E. There is no certainty that giving in to sin's deceit will not create a permanent hardness of their hearts and make them forever resistant to repentance.
- F. This regrettable outcome is particularly so if they allow themselves to be isolated from others to do all our thinking for themselves.

- G. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice;” and Proverbs 27:9 says, “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.”
- H. Therefore, we must remain in faithful participation in worship as a constant encouragement to one another to stand firm and cling to Christ wherever the providence of God might lead us.

APPENDIX 14

PASTORAL EVALUATION OF TEACHING SERIES

Covenant Sermon Series and Curriculum Evaluation Tool		
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary		
Topic	Required Cumulative is 2.7 to satisfy 90% goal	Cumulative
Topic 1 - United Affections		3.88
Topic 2 - Brotherly Love		3.69
Topic 3 - Congregational Worship		3.88
Topic 4 - Biblical Discipleship		3.75
Topic 5 - Harmonious Relationships		3.69
Topic 6 - Genuine Witness		3.94
Topic 7 - Cooperative Generosity		4
Topic 8 - Unceasing Faithfulness		3.63

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A COVENANT VIEW OF MEMBERSHIP AT WESTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH, CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

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The purpose of this project was to develop a covenant view of membership at Westwood Baptist Church, Cleveland, Tennessee. This project also sought to establish a method for ensuring a sustainable means of communicating membership expectations for new members. Chapter 1 provides an overview of this project and the circumstances that justify rationale for its implementation. Chapter 2 presents covenant agreement as an appropriate paradigm for human relationships based on God's use of covenant in his dealings with humanity. Chapter 3 calls attention to the benefits of covenant relationship among members in the local church. Chapter 4 provides a detailed explanation of the fifteen-week duration of the project, focusing on each phase with a summary of the means used to accomplish its goals. Chapter 5 analyzes the project's purpose and goals, and presents the strengths and weaknesses of the project. This chapter concludes with reflections for future implementation.

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