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AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
CROWN & COVENANT  
REFORMED  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

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AN ASSEMBLY OF COVENANT FAMILIES UNITED IN  
SERVICE TO GOD THE FATHER, THE LORD JESUS  
CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR THE  
EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL UNTO THE WHOLE  
WORLD

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## INTRODUCTION TO OUR CHURCH

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We welcome you to the growing fellowship of covenant families here at Crown and Covenant. We recognize that all genuine believers are members of the body of Christ. Yet, we also believe that God grows believers with like convictions together into visible, organized, local bodies to serve the Lord Jesus, the “Head” of the body (Col. 1: 18). In the providence of God, He brought you to this church, in this place, at this time. This booklet is designed to acquaint you with the teachings and mission of this church to enable you to make an intelligent decision about membership. At Crown & Covenant, we believe that church membership carries with it both great privileges and great responsibilities – laws and promises from our Savior King to whom we are covenanted as His bride. Therefore, it should be entered into only after due consideration has been given as to what membership involves. We trust you will prayerfully read this booklet and, after due consideration of our doctrines, will join us as a member of Crown & Covenant and labor with us in fulfilling the call God has given to us.

### PURPOSE

Simply stated, the controlling purpose of Crown & Covenant is the gathering and perfecting of Christ’s saints through the ministry of His Word and Sacraments.

More fully stated, the purpose of this church shall be the preaching of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) for the edification, instruction and discipline of its members and the conversion of the unsaved. The church, through the formal preaching of the gospel and the informal testimony of its members, has the responsibility to bear witness to the truth of God’s word in every area of life including education, politics, and business (Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20). There is no area of our life that is outside the authority of scripture. In light of this great commission given to the church and the fact that families are the basic building blocks of both the church and state, we purpose to:

- 1) Establish a local body committed to both orthodoxy (correct teaching) and *orthopraxy* (correct practice).
- 2) Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
- 3) Train men to sacrificially love and lead, train and affirm women in their honorable role as suitable helpers and champion distinctively biblical education for our children.
- 4) Trumpet the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The church should seek to live in peace with the civil magistrate, as he is a minister of God for good (Romans 13:1-7). However, in the instance that the magistrate seeks to compel the church to disobey the Word of God, then the church must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

### VISION

With God's help and in God's time, we aspire:

1. To be a healthy, growing congregation marked by:
  - a. Expository and biblically faithful preaching that addresses itself to every area of our life; God-exalting, Christ-centered, Spirit filled worship; diligent searching of the scriptures by all, regarding all that is taught.
  - b. Faithful administration of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism.

- c. Diligent, loving, and example-based shepherding and discipline.
  - d. A body of believers in whom the fruits of the Spirit are present in an ever increasing abundance and in which the regenerating work of the Spirit is evidenced by souls being added to our number.
2. To be instrumental in planting and encouraging healthy, growing congregations throughout the greater Houston area which, working together as the regional church (i.e. a presbytery), can accomplish what no single congregation can, namely:
    - a. To be a light set on a hill in the greater Houston area by building families who seek to consecrate to King Jesus all human endeavors and studies.
    - b. To recruit, train, and send out men for gospel ministry.
    - c. To divide our membership, as the Lord grants numbers, for the purpose of growing congregations throughout Houston.
    - d. To become part of a presbytery in greater Houston.
  3. To be continually seeking, as individuals and as families, to be more conformed to the image of Christ and less conformed to the image of this world so that our children will be covenant keepers, knowing the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to a thousand generations.
  4. To disciple the nations, baptizing and teaching them all that God has commanded us, that the kingdom of heaven may be advanced around the world and the consummation hastened as all things are brought under the feet of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

#### **MEANS**

In order to fulfill this mission, we aim to foster:

1. PRAYER which is humble, dependent, expectant, persistent — in secret, in families, in informal gatherings, and in public worship;
2. WORSHIP which exalts God and is reverent, which consciously depends on the mediation of Christ, which is regulated by Scripture, and which expects the Holy Spirit to draw near through the ordinary means of grace - in secret, in families, and in public assemblies;
3. the EDIFICATION of believers:
  - a. By providing faithful preaching & teaching which ever points to Christ, explicates the Bible, and is clear, practical, and bold;
  - b. By providing faithful shepherding care which is intentional, diligent, vigilant, encouraging, which seeks both to train and to correct;
  - c. By seeking to cultivate and encourage loving fellowship & service which is inclusive, supportive, concrete, continuous, and compassionate;

- d. By teaching husbands to love their wives as Christ loves His Bride, the church; to protect, provide, teach, and nurture her as Christ does His Bride;
  - e. By teaching fathers to lead their families by precept and example to know, love, and obey their Creator; to command their children after them as Abraham did His family; to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and to lead their families in daily worship;
  - f. By encouraging older women to admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed;
  - g. By teaching children to honor their fathers and mothers, and crying out to the Lord for the turning of the hearts of fathers to their children, and the children to their fathers;
  - h. By teaching the single and the unmarried to wait on God and encouraging them through their fellowship in our families; and
  - i. By encouraging the saints to submit one to another, in brotherly love, as we develop a Christian community committed to each other and the expansion of the Kingdom of God in this community and beyond.
4. EVANGELIZING this community with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:
- a. By seeking to plant healthy churches which will seek to plant healthy churches;
  - b. By faithfully supporting home and foreign mission endeavors through, prayer, giving, service; and
  - c. By seeking reformation and revival throughout the catholic church; by seeking to contribute toward building her up in peace, purity, unity, and growth.
  - d. By testifying to the Truth of God's word, the crown rights of King Jesus, and the duty of all people to bow before his throne and obey his law.

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## THE CHURCH AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

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### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Simply put, from the human perspective, the church is the society of all who profess the true religion, and their children. It is the visible body of Christ (Eph. 5:23, 25; Col. 1:18). From God's perspective, it is all those whom He has chosen and called, all those who are united to Christ by faith in His atoning work. This vast group of people includes Old Testament and New Testament saints living here and in glory. It is often referred to as the "church universal" (Rev. 5:9). Smaller portions of this vast group, which no man can number (Rev. 7:9), are also designated "churches." The Greek word translated "church" is "ecclesia." It literally means "the called out assembly." Believers are "called out" of the world unto God. In the New Testament, the word "church" is used in reference to groups of believers in houses (Rom. 16:5), cities (1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 11:22), regions (Acts 9:31), and the entire world (1 Cor. 12:27, 28).

### WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH?

The churches of the New Testament had certain characteristics and functions.

- They met for fellowship, prayer, and worship (Acts 2:42, 46).
- They elected officers — elders, and deacons — to teach, lead, and serve (Acts 6:3; 14:23; Eph. 4:11, 12).
- In these churches, baptism and the Lord's Supper were administered (Acts 2:41, 42), fellowship meals were eaten (1 Cor. 11:21; Jude 12) and money was collected for the Lord's work (1 Cor. 16:1, 2).
- These churches also administered "church discipline." That means that they removed from the fellowship those who professed Christ but continued obstinately to live in open sin or teach doctrinal error (1 Cor. 5:1-5; II Cor. 7:14-18; Rom. 16:17-18). The discipline of the church is not punitive or retaliatory. In that sense it is like the discipline of parents or the chastisement of the Lord. It is designed to restore people to obedience, not punish disobedience. This is a significant difference between the punishment of civil magistrate and the discipline of the church.
- There is evidence that New Testament churches also held to particular or definable doctrines to which members adhered (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; Gal. 1:9; Rev. 2:14).

### WHY BE A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH?

What about church membership? Was there any such thing in the New Testament? What is the reason for it?

First of all, God is a God of order. He has created an orderly universe and expects all things to be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). This is why God has given instructions regarding the leadership, functions, and discipline in the church. Now, a part of good order is to be able to impartially distinguish between those who belong to the fellowship (and thus have certain privileges and duties) and those who do not.

John Frame writes, “The very idea of church membership requires defense among some people. Briefly, the defense is this: God calls us to obey our leaders (Heb. 13:17) and to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). These obligations mean nothing if they are not undertaken toward a particular body of believers with their leaders. To undertake such obligations is to take a membership vow. Also, the leaders need to know specifically whom they are responsible to serve (Mt. 20:20-26; Acts 20:28-31); it is not too much for us to allow them to put our names on a list. Such a list, however, is a membership list.”

Membership in the church has always been by written covenants or vows. When God spoke of his blessing on Israel, declaring that he would pour out his Spirit on their children, the result in Is 44:5 is that these children would take oral and written vows of union with Christ. “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. (4) They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. (5) This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel." Isaiah 44:3-5.

Covenant vows were renewed by Israel in Joshua 8. The content of that covenant is in De 27 & 28. At the reading of this covenant, all the people gave their verbal assent, saying Amen. (De 27:26). Historically the church has practiced written membership covenants. See for example Increase Mather's sermon, where he said, “We have in our church covenant promised faithfully to watch over one another's souls. O what a world of iniquity would be prevented, if this branch of the covenant were duly observed.”<sup>1</sup> Another example is the Assembly of Divines that met in Boston on June 4, 1657 to discuss the topic of church membership and children. While not directly addressing the issue of the church covenant, they clearly assume the existence church covenants. For example, they say, “When a parent is called to remove from one church to another, he is also called to enter into covenant in that church to which he removes. Paul was first baptized and in communion at Damascus, Acts 9:29, afterwards removed unto Jerusalem, and joined to the church there, verse. 26. This, the very nature of order calls for, because otherwise he can neither do all the duties, nor enjoy all the privileges of a member in the one church or in the other; not in the former, because he dwells not with them, nor in the other, because though dwelling amongst them, he joined not with them in covenant.”<sup>2</sup>

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO OUR CHURCH**

To become a member of the church universal, you must be converted. Conversion is repenting of sin and believing on Christ. To become a member of a local church, you must make a credible public confession of your faith in Christ before the session and before the church. Credible means that what you say with your mouth you also practice in your life and that your life shows evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Confessing Christ involves repentance and faith. Although these are distinct elements of conversion, they always come to together. It is impossible to have one without the other.

Repentance involves three elements,

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<sup>1</sup> Mather, Increase. *Returning Unto God the Great Concernment of a Covenant People*, preached to the Second Church in Boston, March 17, 1679. Printed in Boston by John Foster, 1680.

<sup>2</sup> A Disputation Concerning Church Members & Their Children in Answer to 21 Questions: Wherein the State of such Children when Adult, Together with their Duty toward the Church, and the Churches Duty toward them is discussed by an Assembly of Divines meeting in Boston, New England June 4, 1657. Printed by F. Hayes, for Samuel Thompson at the Bishop's Head in Paul's Church-yard. 1659.

1. Admission of sin. We must be convinced in our heart that we are sinners.
2. Sorrow for sin. We must have Godly sorrow for sin. This is not a mere remorse for sin such as Judas had. It is a God-centered sorrow born of love. We realize that we have grieved the one who died for us and this leads us to beg the Savior's forgiveness.
3. Turning from sin to righteousness. Having admitted our sin and been sorry that we have grieved our Savior, we must then forsake our sin. We must turn to God with a desire to obey him. The fruit of repentance is obedience.

But as important as repentance is, sorrow for sin and turning from it can never make us right with God. Faith is the instrument through which we receive the blessings of Christ's atoning sacrifice and meritorious righteousness. Faith in Christ also involves three elements.

1. Requisite knowledge. Contrary to popular opinion, saving faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith must always have an object. Saving faith has Christ as its object. In order to have faith, we must know something of the object of our faith. We don't need to know much, but we do need to know that, in the words of Paul, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. We must know who Christ is (the Son of God, of the same essence of the Father), what he has done (he was made flesh, was crucified, died, and rose again), why he died and rose again (to save his people), and that we are one of those for whom he died.
2. Conviction of the truth. It is not merely enough to know about Christ, who he is and what he has done; we must also be convinced that what we know is true. Our mind must assent to the truth that Jesus is what he claimed to be. Faith is a conviction based on evidence sufficient to convince the mind.
3. Trust in Christ. We must also trust in Christ. Even the demons believe and tremble. They know who Christ is, what he has done, and are convinced it is true, but they are not trusting in Christ for salvation.

Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

These are the elements of a full confession of faith in Christ. Prior to making a profession of faith before the congregation, the session will examine you to assure itself, so far as possible, that you possess the doctrinal knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you have repented of your sins and are trusting for salvation on the merits of Christ alone, and that you are determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life.

Also, if you have not already been baptized, you must be baptized (Acts 2:42; 19:4, 5) upon joining the church. Believers who are members of another Bible-believing church should have a transfer letter sent to Crown & Covenant, affirming that you are a member in good standing and not under church discipline.

In order to assist those who contemplate making a public profession of faith in Christ to understand the implications of this significant act and to perform it intelligently, we offer a membership class covering basic Christian doctrine.

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## THE ORGANIZATION AND TEACHINGS OF OUR CHURCH

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### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

The CPC (Covenant Presbyterian Church) stands in the line of historic orthodox Christianity. Our creed ("credo" is Latin for "I believe"), the Westminster Confession of Faith, was written in 1647 and is held by many Bible-believing Presbyterian denominations throughout the world. This creed both defines our distinctives and lays out our positions on the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It adopts the positions that the church leaders developed in the early Church Councils (Nicea AD 325; Constantinople, 381, Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451) on the doctrines of the Trinity, deity of Jesus Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. It also states our Protestant positions: that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and that the Bible alone is the infallible and inerrant rule of faith and practice.

First, we will briefly review the essential doctrines that set us apart from non-Christian religions such as Islam and Judaism, from the apostate "Christian" religions of Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, and from the false "Christian" cults such as the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### THE BIBLE IS GOD'S INERRANT WORD

- The Bible alone is the only infallible rule of faith and practice and not the Pope, Church Councils, tradition, nor human reason.
- Scripture is supernatural revelation; it is of divine origin (II Sam. 23:2; II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19-21; Rev. 22:18-19).
- Scripture is inerrant in all its parts (Isa. 8:20; Jn. 10:35; Mt. 5:18; Jn. 17:17) and in all matters addressed, (history, chronology and science as well as salvation; see Mt. 12:40; Rom. 5:12, 14). The very words, tenses, and letters of Scripture are inspired and inerrant (Gal. 3:16; Mt. 22:31-32; Mt.5:18).

#### THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The Shorter Catechism Question #21 - Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A. The Only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever.

#### *Christ is fully God*

- He is credited with the works and attributes of God (Jn. 1:3; Mt. 9:4).
- He accepted worship as God (Jn. 5:23; Phil. 2:10-11).
- He claimed to be God (Jn. 5:18; 10:33) and is called God by the inspired New Testament writers (Jn. 1:1; 11:8 NASV; 20:28; Heb. 1:8).
- He is identified as Jehovah "JaHWeH" (Mt. 3:3 and Isa. 40:3; Jn. 12:37-42 and Isa. 6:1-3; Heb. 1:8a, 10-12 and Ps. 102:25-27, (22)).

*Christ is fully human*

- He came in the flesh (Jn. 1:14, Rom. 1:3; 9:5; Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 2:14).
- Christ is one Person in two natures (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 9:5; Jn. 3:13; Mt. 1:23).

THE DEITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The Holy Spirit is God.*

- Divine works are performed by Him (Gen. 1:2; Mt. 12:28; 1n. 3:5; Rom 8:1).
- Divine attributes are ascribed to Him (Ps. 139:7-10; Isa. 40:13; I Cor. 2:10-11).
- Divine names are given to Him (Ex. 17:7 and Heb. 3:7-9; Acts 5:3-4).

*The Holy Spirit is a Person, not a power, influence, or energy.*

- He has the characteristics of a person (Jn. 15:26; Eph. 4:30).
- He is named with other persons (Acts 15:28; Mt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14), and distinguished from other Divine Persons (Jr. 12:31-32; 1n. 16:7, 13-15).
- Though the Greek word for “spirit” (pneuma) is neuter, yet the masculine pronoun *ekeinos*, meaning “that one,” is used to refer to the Spirit (Jn. 16:8, 13, 14).
- He is called “another” (*allos*) meaning “another other of the same kind” (as Christ), “Comforter” (indicating a person) in John 14:16.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The word “Trinity” is a contraction of “tri-unity,” the summary of the Biblical teaching that God is three persons in one God.

Shorter Catechism Question #5: Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but one only. the living and true God

Question #6: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead,- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

*Three Scriptural Truths that yield the Doctrine of the Trinity:*

- There is only one God (Dt. 4:35-39; 6:4; Isa. 44:6; 45:21-22).
- The Son and the Spirit are distinct Persons from the Father (Mt. 27:46; Jn. 5:32, 37; Mt. 12:31-32; Jn. 16:7, 13-15).
- The Son is God and the Spirit is God (see above).

*For a brief summary of other essential doctrines taught in the Scripture, please read:*

*Morton Smith, Testimony or The Westminster Confession by G.I. Williamson*

## **REFORMED DISTINCTIVES**

It is important to distinguish between fundamental, essential doctrines that the Scripture defines as necessary to be believed for salvation and secondary doctrines (such as baptism, church government and eschatology) concerning which sincere believers may come to different interpretations of the Scriptural data without departing from the Christian faith. The doctrines that we discuss next fit into the secondary category. They are all very important Scriptural teachings and much needed in our day, but it is not necessary to understand or hold to these teachings in order to get to heaven, nor even to be members of this church. These teachings can be called our Presbyterian distinctives, that is to say, they are what distinguishes us from other Bible-believing Protestant churches.

### **WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?**

Reformed theology takes its name from the Protestant Reformation that took place in the sixteenth century when the church was reformed to be more Biblical in its teaching and practice. It has also been called “Calvinism” after John Calvin, who so clearly and systematically taught these doctrines in His Institutes of the Christian Religion, and “Augustinianism” after Augustine, who defended these doctrines in the fourth and fifth centuries. It could also be called “Paulinism” because this was not new doctrine but is taught throughout the Bible and is especially clear in the epistles of Paul.

#### *Emphasis: the supremacy of God.*

The supremacy (or sovereignty) of God in and over all things is the focal point of scripture. Before the creation of this world, God ordained all that would come to pass. He owns all things, has rights of ownership over all things, and controls all things according to His will (Gen. 50:20; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:25, 35; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Eph. 1:4-5, 11).

#### *God's Grace in Salvation*

God's supremacy in all things is true in the matter of salvation as well. This Scriptural teaching has come to be nicknamed “the doctrines of grace” because they emphasize that salvation is by grace - God's unearned favor - alone. Man only comes to God after God has first worked in that particular person's heart to draw him (Jn. 6:44, 37). These doctrines are frequently summarized as follows:

#### **Total Inability of Man**

Every mere man since Adam is born with a sinful nature (Rom. 5-12) and sins (Rom. 3:23). No man can please God by His actions (Isa. 64:6). No natural man understands the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). He does not desire to come to God (Jn. 1:13; Rom 3:11). He does not have the ability in himself to accept Christ (1n. 6:44, 65; Eph. 2:1, 5).

#### **Unconditional Election**

Left to themselves, all of fallen mankind would choose to reject God; the end result would be that every last one would end up in hell. But God graciously elected (chose) to draw some to Himself

through the Holy Spirit. This election was unconditional in that there was nothing in us to merit our being chosen.

See Jn. 6:37-39; 15:16; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:11-23; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 2:13.

### **Definite Atonement**

Having thus elected some to eternal life, God sent forth His Son to secure their salvation by His death for their sins. Both Calvinism and Arminianism agree that the atonement is sufficient to pay for the sins of everyone in the world (it was an infinite payment), and that it is efficient only to those who accept Christ (only their sins will be forgiven that they may be in heaven). Where they differ is on the intent of the atonement. Arminianism says that Christ died to make it possible for all men to be saved but did not guarantee that any would actually be saved. We believe scripture states that Christ died to save God's elect (see Gal. 1:4; Mt. 1:21; Rom. 8:30). If Christ's death atoned for the sins of all mankind, then everyone's debt has been paid and God could not justly send anyone to hell. But people do go to hell, therefore Christ's death did not atone for the sins of all men.

Scripture Proof.. Christ died not just to make salvation possible but to actually save sinners (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 19:20; Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:15). Christ died for a particular group (Mt. 1:21; Jn. 10:11, 15, 26-28; Rom. 8:32-33; Eph. 5:25-27). God's work of salvation is an unbroken chain (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 2:4-10).

### **Irresistible Grace**

When God does something, the result is certain. When the Holy Spirit inwardly calls a person to believe, that person comes to Christ. We should not picture the person coming against His will. Rather the Holy Spirit creates a new heart (i.e. the work of regeneration which Jesus compared to the wind in John 3) and so changes and motivates the man's will such that he now desires and loves that which he before hated.

Shorter Catechism # 31: What is effectual calling?

A: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Scripture proof: Jn. 1:13, 6:37, 44; 10:16; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 2:8-10; Jam. 1:18.

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

Those whom Holy Spirit regenerated and brought to faith in Christ will be kept by Christ (Jude 1; 1 Jn. 5:18) with the result that they will continue in the true faith and grow in Christ. He will not fall away and be lost. They have eternal life now, forever.

Scripture proof. Jn. 6:39; 10:28-29; Eph. 1:13-14; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:4-6. Those passages that seem to speak of Christians falling away and being lost refer to mere professors, not true professors, of the faith. These professors are members of the visible church through baptism, but they are covenant breakers and not members of the invisible church.

### *Perspective*

This is a very deep doctrine. Many have difficulty in understanding it, some become unsettled by it, and other fight very hard against it. While we must always stand for all that the Bible teaches, we must be sensitive to others and never force these doctrines on someone or berate someone for not

understanding it. In all ways, we should present the truth of Scripture in love and allow the Lord to open the hearts (II Tim 2:23-25).

Much of the opposition to this doctrine, we believe, is due to our sinful human nature. Even Christians often have a humanistic viewpoint of the universe. We see ourselves, not God, as the center of all things and we rebel against the idea that we were created solely for God's glory. Only as we submit to God and His Word can we accept the idea that we are but clay pots made by God to use as He desires (Rom. 9:18-24).

When we grasp that, then our praise to God truly becomes overwhelming as we thank Him for all the unmerited riches that He has graciously bestowed on us undeserving sinners. This is a tremendous doctrine but let us remember that both Calvinistic and Arminian believers are God's elect and should extend Christian recognition and fellowship to each other. This area of doctrine should not be used to sever Christian fellowship (I Cor. 12:25).

*Suggested Reading for Further Study*

*John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied*

*Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

*Thomas & Steele, The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*

#### WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY?

Covenant theology is “the classic theology of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, which regards the entire Bible as the progressive revelation of a single consistent theme, namely, the covenant established by God with His people, by which they are brought to the eternal glorification and enjoyment of Himself” (J.G. Vos). The approach popularized by the Scofield and Ryrie Study Bibles, i.e. Dispensationalism, views God's dealings with man as a series of separate and unrelated stages (or “dispensations”). Some forms of dispensationalism teach that man was saved by keeping the law during the Dispensation of Law (Old Testament) and by faith during the Dispensation of Grace. Dispensationalists would say that the Old Testament no longer applies in any way to the Christian. Covenant theology, on the other hand, sees God's dealings as one unfolding covenant that though it passes through various stages, nevertheless has an organic unity, stretching from Adam to the end of the world. We believe scripture teaches the following:

##### *The Federal Headship of Adam and Christ*

Only Adam had the ability to go to heaven through perfectly keeping the law of God. When Adam (as federal head or representative of mankind) fell into sin, he passed on to his race a sinful nature (Rom. 5:1-19; I Cor. 15:21-22). Since then, all mere men are born sinners (Rom. 3:23) and are utterly incapable of gaining eternal life through the Covenant of Works (perfectly keeping the law) (Rom. 3:19-20). In astonishing mercy, God established a Covenant of Grace whereby men from Adam till the end of the world can be saved through faith in the atoning work of the Messiah. This salvation was accomplished by Jesus Christ, who (as Head of the Church) fulfilled the Covenant of Works by perfectly keeping God's law (to win the life promised in the covenant) and by dying on the cross (to pay the penalty for the failure of men to keep God's covenant), thus meriting salvation for God's elect (Rom. 5:15-19; I Cor. 15: 21-22).

## *The Unity of Christ's Church*

Thus, both in Old and New Testament times, salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and His saving work (read Rom. 4; Gal. 3). Galatians 3:6-7 asserts that Abraham was saved through faith in the coming Messiah. Galatians 3:10-11 asserts that no man could ever be saved by keeping the law because since the fall, no mere man has been capable of perfectly keeping God's law. Also, Hebrews 9:15 states that the saints in Old Testament times were saved by Christ's redemptive payment for their sins.

While God's Covenant of Grace goes through different administrations (Adamic Covenant, Noahic Covenant, Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, New Covenant), the fact that they are but fuller unfoldings of the same basic covenant is shown in Galatians 3:14-17, 29. These verses show that New Testament believers, who are under the New Covenant (Mt. 26:28; Heb. 8:6-13), are also considered to be under the Abrahamic Covenant. God's true church, the body or bride of Christ, consists of all true believers throughout all ages (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:9, 12-14). Romans 11:17-21 depicts the Old Testament Jewish believers and New Testament Gentile believers as part of one continuing body. The New Testament Church is not a totally new organization. It is a continuation of the Old Testament church (Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12). God's church is one. New Testament saints are called the true spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3) and stand in the line of the covenant promises (see Acts 2:39; Rom. 4:11-13, 16; Gal. 3:29).

*Suggested Reading for Further Study*

*William Hendriksen, The Covenant of Grace*

*O. Palmer Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants*

## WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH?

### *Introduction*

A sacrament is, very simply, a picture lesson that reminds us of the work of salvation that Christ has accomplished and that the Holy Spirit has applied to us. God has given His sacraments to us as His pledge that He will grant us the many blessings that He has promised us, and as a reminder of the responsibilities that we have as children of God and members of Christ's body.

Some Christians wonder how to view the sacraments. One common error is to place some magic power in the water or in the bread and wine, as if to say God's grace is automatically dispensed. This has caused many to focus on the elements and procedure instead of Jesus Christ. Another mistake (especially among evangelicals) is to treat the sacraments as a mirage - that is, as mere ceremonies that have very limited real meaning. Many Christians participate in the sacraments because they are commanded, but they don't seem to be real and bring blessings to our lives. Between the two extremes, let's find the Biblical way to blessing and growth through God's two sacraments.

God presents His Word to us in a tangible form (the sacraments) that speaks to our senses. God encourages us and reminds us through symbolism of His work of salvation offered in Christ.

## *Baptism*

### **The Meaning of Baptism**

Baptism is the sacrament that pictures and testifies that God grafts us into His covenant of salvation and the true church of Christ (Acts 2:38-41). The water symbolizes the washing away of our sins through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). The true baptism is spiritual and takes place in our heart when the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart and new desires and unites us to Christ (Rom 6:4). The outward water baptism symbolizes the cleaning and union with Christ that the Holy Spirit accomplishes.

### **The Mode of Baptism**

When we think of washing today, we often think of dunking a plate in a dishpan of water. But in Biblical times, such an action would not have pictured cleansing to the Jews. The Israelites were raised on the symbolism of the Old Testament. There, spiritual cleansing was always pictured by sprinkling or pouring of water or blood upon the object (Lev. 3:8; 14:7; 16:14-16; Num. 19:11-13, 18-19).

So uniform was this symbolism, that the prophet Isaiah used sprinkling to picture the work of Christ in cleansing sin: "Behold, My servant ... will sprinkle many nations" (Isa. 52:14-15). And Peter, in New Testament times, parallels "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" with "purified your souls" (1 Pet. 1:2, 22).

The Bible teaches that the meaning of baptism is spiritual cleansing (Eze. 36:25; 1n. 3:22, 2; Rom. 6:4, 5-7; Tit. 3:5). Thus, the only form of a baptism that would have carried the proper symbolism and made sense to the Jew was baptism by sprinkling.

The writer of the book of Hebrews settles the Scriptural mode of baptism for us because in Hebrews 9:10, he calls the Old Testament "sprinklings" (9:19) "baptisms" (9:10 KJV "washings").

Baptistic arguments from prepositions are not strong, since Greek prepositions have a wide range of meanings. In addition, many New Testament occurrences of baptisms rule out immersion (Acts 8:26; 9:18 literally "arising, he was baptized"). Water was a precious commodity in the Middle East. What water was available was needed for drinking. Finally, the earliest pictures of baptisms (found in the catacombs) show sprinkling as the method of baptisms, and the earliest church baptistries (in Asia Minor) were far too shallow for an immersion.

While we believe that the Scriptural and proper mode of baptism is sprinkling; yet, we accept pouring or immersion as valid forms of baptism. The reason is that the Scriptures do not make an issue over the mode; it is the public profession of one's faith in Christ that is emphasized as vital to validity of one's baptism (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41).

### **The Subjects of Baptism**

Our Baptist brethren argue that because baptism is a public profession of one's faith in Christ (which it is for adults - Acts 2:41); therefore, infants, that are not capable of professing faith in Christ, should not be baptized. They often think that we believe that baptism saves the infant. This is not true. While Roman Catholicism falls into the error of thinking that the baptism automatically washes away the infant's sins, we want to make it clear that the Scriptures do not teach that and we, as Presbyterians, do not believe that.

Why then do we baptize infants? We baptize infants of believers because God commands it. In Genesis 17:9-11, God commanded Abraham to apply the sign and seal of the covenant of grace to his infant sons. Romans 4:11 states that Abraham's circumcision was a sign of the righteousness that he received through faith in the coming Messiah (John 8:56 states that Abraham looked forward to the

coming of Christ to make atonement for sins). Here's the rub. In the New Testament, circumcision has the same meaning that baptism has. Colossians 2:11-13 even uses the terms circumcision and baptism interchangeably when discussing our regeneration in Christ. Both circumcision and baptism stand for a public testimony to the cleansing work that the Holy Spirit has accomplished within the believer. Yet God commanded Abraham to circumcise His infants before they were old enough to exercise faith. God included the children of believers in His covenant (Gen. 17:7) and He still does so today (Acts 2:38-39). When a child does come to faith in the Lord, he should make a public profession of faith.

The Bible tells us in several ways that children of at least one believer still today have the privilege to receive the sign of the covenant. Genesis 17:13 made this sacrament an eternal one. While the form has changed (to baptism), the meaning and practice of the sacrament has not changed. Secondly, the New Testament makes no mention of a child of believing parents waiting till he became an adult to be baptized. On the contrary, the New Testament mentions several accounts of household baptism (Acts 15:15. 33: Cor. 1:17). While it is not impossible, it is very unlikely these households had no young children. Third, Acts 2:39 and 16:31 make it clear that under the New Covenant, children are still included in the covenant. I Corinthians 7:14 indicates that children with at least one believing parent have a relation to God that the children of unbelieving parents do not have. Thus they should be baptized and be members of the visible church just as they were in the Old Testament.

### *The Lord's Supper*

The Lord's Supper consists of bread, a picture of the broken body of Christ, and the cup as a picture of Christ's blood shed upon the cross for us (Mt. 26:26-28; Lk. 22:19-20). As baptism relates to circumcision, so the Lord's Supper relates to the Old Testament feast of Passover. The Lord's Supper is a new form given to the sacrament that pictures Christ's death and reminds us of our privileges and responsibilities as partakers of His salvation. Instead of a lamb representing Christ our sacrifice, the bread and wine represent Him.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of His death for us and our deliverance from the punishment we deserve. It is not a sacrifice, but a "sacrificial feast" like Passover, in which the lamb was eaten after the sacrifice had already been made. The sacrifice of Christ has already been made once for all (Heb. 9:24-26; 10:10-18).

We not only commemorate Christ's sacrifice but apply it to our souls; Christ's "flesh and blood" sacrificed for us are our spiritual food. Christ's presence in the elements is spiritual (Jn. 6:54, 55), not physical. Our souls are fed and nourished by Christ our Passover Lamb, as we receive Him by faith (1 Cor. 5:7). This is a visible picture of Christ, and as the Christian feeds upon the written Word for spiritual growth in Grace, so he should meditate upon Christ's death (frequently and through the Communion) as a means of spiritual growth.

The spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper draws us into intimate fellowship with God and fellow believers (1 Cor. 10:16-17). We invite all believers who have made a public profession of faith and are communicant members in good standing of a Bible believing church to partake with us each Lord's Day. We ask that all who have not made a public profession of faith, including children of believers, to refrain from participation in the Lord's Supper. Before partaking of this sacrament, believers ought to examine their hearts, confess sin, and thank our gracious God for giving us Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23-31).

## HOW IS OUR CHURCH GOVERNED?

We often have membership classes in our church (like this one) with people from a wide range of backgrounds. So picture yourself eavesdropping on a membership class with Ricky and Lucy. Ricky used to be a Roman Catholic. And Lucy comes from an independent Baptist background. Both show clear evidence of faith in Christ. Both can give a clear “yes” to the first three membership vows.

### *The Last Membership Vow*

But, as we talk, the fourth vow raises some hackles. It says, “Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the government of the Covenant Presbyterian Church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or practice, to heed its discipline?”

Ricky says, “Wait a minute! What does this mean? Do I still have to listen to the Pope?” And Lucy chimes in, “Yeah. Who's in charge here? Where I come from we used to call congregational meetings just to decide whether to buy pens for the church office! Who runs this church anyway?”

These are good questions. How does Christ care for His people? How does the Presbyterian form of church government differ from what Lucy and Ricky have seen before? These are important questions, especially for anyone who wants to take seriously membership in the church.

Now, this topic of church government isn't necessary to salvation. It's not central. But that doesn't mean it's not important. The Bible often does discuss the authority structure or “polity” of the church, so we shouldn't underrate it. God's Word reveals many facts that enable us to know the history, doctrine, worship, and government of the church that existed in apostolic days. The principles of government that were set up in a church that was founded by inspired men and, therefore, must have the blessing of God. Since this is true, we want to answer Ricky and Lucy with statements that are based on God's Word.

### **Jesus Christ is the King and Head of the Church**

“Who's in charge here?” The bottom-line is that Jesus Christ is in charge. Christ rules the church. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28:28). Many other passages confirm that Jesus is the source of all spiritual authority. Colossians 1:18: “And He is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.” Ephesians 5:23: “Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior.”

Christ alone is the Head of the church. Church members are subject to him. There's only one King - the only mediator between God and man - King Jesus, and He rules His church by His Word and Spirit.

### **How Christ Rules His Church**

Lucy and Ricky both nod, and Ricky says, “We can see that, but how does Christ rule the church?” We explain that Christ rules the church by His Word and Spirit, and He ordinarily does so through the ministry of men. He uses men to rule and teach His church. Ephesians 4:7-13 tells how He gives gifts to His church. In particular, He gives officers necessary to build His church. God calls these men His gifts to the church. This doesn't mean He gave them the right to be pompous bosses but it does mean that he's called them to serve the church with His authority. They exercise their authority by delegation from Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12: “It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”) Furthermore, as they do their work together in Christ's name, the Lord Jesus is there with them (Mt. 18:18-20).

## **General Office**

"Hold on," says Lucy, "I understand what you're saying, but don't all believers have authority? Don't you believe in 'the priesthood of all believers' around here?"

Good question. We assure Lucy that Christ has given His Spirit and a measure of His authority to each of His people. Romans 8:15-16: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Paul goes on to insist that every believer is an heir of God and a coheir with Christ (v. 17). Further, we tell Lucy that God has made all Christians to be kings, priests, and prophets (cf. 1 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 1:5-6; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-4). As we study these passages, we see that each church member has God's Spirit and is simultaneously a prophet (learning God's Word and telling it to others), a priest (offering spiritual sacrifices to the Lord and praying for others), and a king (carrying God's will into action). This is the general office of believer and we encourage both Lucy and Ricky to exercise it in faith and confidence.

## **Special Office**

So every member has this general office. However, that does not make every member a minister of the Word or an elder in the specialized, technical sense of those terms. In fact, the great majority of church members do not hold these special offices. They do not exercise oversight like the elders do.

Our Lord continues to build His church through the ministry of men whom He calls and endues with special gifts for teaching, ruling, and serving. Some of these special gifts can be most profitably exercised only when those who possess them have been publicly recognized as called of Christ to minister authority. It is proper to speak of such a publicly recognized function as an office, and to designate men by such scriptural titles of office and calling as pastor, teacher, bishop, elder, and deacon.

Once again, we show Lucy and Ricky that these special offices are taught in God's Word. We read that the exalted Christ "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph. 4:11-12). On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church (Acts 14:23). The apostle Paul exhorted: The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Paul also pleaded with the elders at Ephesus: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The point of these Scriptures is clear. By His Holy Spirit, God makes men to be overseers of His church. Yet at the same time He uses the people in the congregation to recognize the gifts and qualifications that He gives to certain men. As in the apostolic church, so today, office bearers are recognized and chosen by the people. The Bible shows that the assembly of God's people examine the external qualifications of men according to their godliness, gifts, and ability to lead, as Paul discusses in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. We see an example of the people's involvement in choosing their leaders in Acts 6: seven men were chosen from the congregation to be the first deacons.

## **Ordination**

First they are elected. Then, according to the Bible's example and instruction, every office bearer in the church is inaugurated into His office. That means he receives the church's solemn public approval that God has called and gifted and qualified him for the office. He is set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. This is called "ordination." The Bible gives an example of this in Numbers 27:15-23, the ordination of Joshua:

*"Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: 'Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.' And the Lord said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At His word they shall go out, and at His word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.'" So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid His hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses."*

Ordination confers authority. It commissions and authorizes a person to do a specific task. This has its roots in the Old Testament, but it carries over into the New Testament. 1 Timothy 4:14 refers to the ordination of Timothy. "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." The Greek word translated "body of elders" is "presbytery." Here we see that the presbytery (or the elders acting collectively) has the power to solemnly set apart others to church office in the Name of King Jesus.

### *Nature of Church Authority*

"Ok," says Ricky. "But what's the nature of authority in the church? Is it real? Who makes the laws?" We assure Ricky that the authority of the elders is indeed real - very real. God makes this clear in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." Now that does not put the officers of a church on a par with Christ himself. Ricky knows very well that for practical purposes, the Roman Catholic church does take that position. It attributes to the church and the Pope the infallibility that belongs only to Christ. The truth of the matter is this: the officers of the church represent Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ delegates authority to them. Therefore, they're subordinate to Jesus Christ. Their authority is under Christ's authority.

### **Church authority is derived and not original**

To understand this more clearly, we need to see several things. First, Christ's authority is original. But the authority of church officers is derived. It's like a king who delegates authority to His ambassador. The ambassador never pretends to be equal to the king but he does speak for the king.

### **Church authority is ministerial and not magisterial**

Second, Christ's authority is sovereign and magisterial. But the authority of church officers is only ministerial. This means that leaders in the church are not to exalt themselves. 1 Peter 5:2-3: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." They're to be ministers - servants. II Corinthians 4:5: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Our Lord Jesus Himself described leadership in terms of servanthood in Mark 10:42-45: "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.'" Pastors and elders should have a heart to serve.

### **Church authority is declarative and not legislative**

Third, Christ is the Lawgiver of His church. The officers aren't. This means that rather than imposing man-made laws on the church, elders must declare the law of Christ that is given in the Bible.

Their authority is declarative, not legislative. God's law is perfect, and nothing should be added to it. The Bible is our only infallible rule of faith and practice. To be sure, so that things may be done decently and in order, the leaders of the church may make certain regulations (e.g., times for public worship, rules for congregational meetings; procedures for determining church budgets; etc.). But such regulations must never compete with the law of Christ. The point is that officers in the church do have real authority, and yet at every point they are subordinate to Christ.

### *The Biblical Offices*

“Well,” says Lucy, “what are the Biblical offices?” Well, there were extraordinary and temporary offices, like apostle and prophet. But the ordinary and ongoing offices in the church are those given for three things: the ministry of the Word and sacrament, the ministry of rule, and the ministry of mercy. In Bible terminology, those who minister in mercy and helps are called “deacons” (see 1 Tim. 3:8ff). Those who teach and govern the church are called “elders” or “bishops” (see 1 Tim. 3:1ff, 1 Pet. 5:1ff, Heb13:17). The Bible distinguishes those elders or bishops who labor also in the Word in addition to ruling. (see 1 Tim. 5:17). We typically call those elders Pastors. However all elders have the same office and the same authority.

For a church to be healthy, there must be sound teaching and there must be faithful obedience to God's Word by the church and the believers in the church. These two areas are the responsibility of the session. And there must be active service and mutual love expressed in practical ways – this is the responsibility of the deacons under the session.

You don't have to try hard to see how the lack of any of these would weaken the church, endanger her members, and spoil her witness to the world. If you don't have sound teaching, the church must finally collapse in every way, because as with an individual Christian, so with a congregation, “as a man thinks, so he is.” But if you have sound teaching but no discipline and the people who listen to that teaching live disobedient and faithless lives, the truth that is taught will be undermined by the example that is set. “Actions speak louder than words.” But if there is sound gospel teaching and outward conformity to God's law, but there is no practice of love and generosity, the Christian faith loses its power and vitality. “If I know all mysteries and speak in the tongues of men and angels but have not love, I am nothing.”

We - especially in our age - might have other ideas about what makes a good church, a faithful church, and a successful church. But the Lord seems to think that, most fundamentally, a faithful church rests on sound teaching and worship, faithful rule and discipline, and the active practice of service and charity. So much does the Lord think this that He established an office in the church to see to each of those activities.

### *Biblical Church Government Contra Hierarchy*

Ricky says, “How do these Biblical principles of church government differ from what we had in the Roman Catholic Church?”

We explain to Ricky that there are several points to consider. Roman Catholic Church government is characterized by hierarchy. This system of government forms a pyramid of popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, and other offices.

### **The Pope vs. King Jesus**

The essential principle involved in this hierarchy is the notion that Jesus gives direct authority to these officers in the church. They become His “vicars” (or substitutes). And that's the first point of conflict - the belief that the pope rules as the true vicar of the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth - that he

exercises Christ's power and authority over the universal church. The Roman Catholic Church claims that the Pope has the absolute supremacy and supernatural infallibility of our Lord. We contend that this usurps the Kingship of Jesus Christ over His church. Christ alone is the King and Head of the church, and He has not turned His place or His glory over to any earthly successor.

### **Hierarchy vs. Parity of Rule**

There are two other important differences that distinguish hierarchy from biblical, Presbyterian government. One is that “no permanent office in the church is higher than that of the presbyter.” We see this from studies of the words translated “overseer, elder, and bishop.” As we study these words, we find that they were used interchangeably in the New Testament. “Elder” (presbyteroi) and “bishop” or “overseer” (episcopoi) were two names for the same office-bearer. Thus, it's unbiblical to have a hierarchy of bishops over presbyters.

### **Unilateral Rule vs. Joint Rule**

Second, government in the church is not exclusively clerical or professional. This means that the church is governed by more than just teaching elders. Other elders share with the minister in this ruling function. We see this in Acts 14:23 (they appointed elders in every church...). We see it in Acts 20:17 (he called the elders of the church). And we see it in Philippians 1:1 (Paul ... to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and the deacons). In a hierarchical church, only one presbyter cares for each congregation but this doesn't reflect the biblical picture of the plurality of church elders.

How does this apply to the question of ordination? In a hierarchy, only the bishop (or some other prelate) ordains. His presence is essential to the act. But as we saw earlier from Acts 6:6 and 1 Timothy 4:14, the apostolic church ordained men by the laying on of hands of the presbytery, the body of elders. And this is consistent with the New Testament teaching that the church is governed by a group of elders.

In Biblical church government, elders and churches work together and there are many other benefits to this. On the positive side, they can plan, provide leadership, and give oversight to all sorts of ministries that individual churches cannot accomplish on their own. On the negative side, it helps to deal fairly with problems that may arise.

With this joint rule of elders, when problems arise that the local church cannot solve, they have the privilege of appealing to a wider court. If someone thinks that the church is acting in an unbiblical way, then in a Presbyterian form of government, the person has the opportunity to appeal to the presbytery. The assembly of Acts 15 shows how the apostolic church handled disputes and disagreements in the church. When their decree went forth, it went in the name of the apostles and elders (Acts 15:23). In a hierarchy, however, there is no such provision for appeal. For example, how can someone appeal against the pope?

In our Presbyterian form of government, we have governing assemblies. The session governs the local church. The presbytery exercises jurisdiction over what is common to the ministers, sessions, and churches within a prescribed region. The general assembly governs over such matters that concern the whole church. Each of these bodies works to maintain truth and righteousness, and to oppose erroneous opinions and sinful practices that threaten the peace, purity, unity, or progress of the church.

These, then, are some of the major points of conflict between Presbyterianism and hierarchy.

## *Biblical Church Government Contra Independency*

During this time, Lucy becomes impatient. “I don't care about those hierarchical prelates,” she says, “because where I came from, our motto was ‘Power to the People!’ What's the basic difference between these biblical principles of church government and what we had in my independent Baptist church?” So we explain to Lucy that whereas there are a number of points in common, there are also some important differences.

### **Democracy vs. Christ's authority**

First, Congregationalists seem to demand the authoritative concurrence of the whole church in all matters of government. This means that the whole congregation rules itself. This is the heresy of democracy. When this democratic principle is asserted in the church, it means that unless the members consent to them, the decisions of the officers are null and void.

But the Bible insists that the church is not a democracy; it's a monarchy. Jesus Christ is the King and Head of the Church. And King Jesus rules His church by His Word and Spirit. And He does so through His officers. So in contrast to the democracy of congregationalism, Presbyterians stress the authority of church governors. They act immediately as the representatives of Christ, and as called and appointed by Him. They are not just deputies of the congregation nor are their decisions subject to review by the congregation. To be sure, the congregation confirms God's calling and gifting of elders by their vote, and Presbyterian leaders try to use every proper means to explain, persuade, and instruct church members in order to secure their agreement in the proceedings of the elders. But unlike independent congregations, Presbyterians do not believe that the lawfulness or binding nature of the acts of the elders depends on the consent of the people. Otherwise, the office of elder is not something God appointed at all. It's just a human arrangement that depends for its existence and authority on the will of the members. But as we saw earlier, God's Word teaches that the authority of these offices is established and conferred by King Jesus himself. Therefore, we follow the Presbyterian understanding of these offices over against the independent or Congregationalist view.

### **Unaccountability vs. Accountability**

A second area where we disagree with independency is the fact that their congregations and past are not accountable to anyone else beyond their own individual congregational meetings. Congregationalism (as its name suggests) assumes that each congregation, including its officers, has within itself all the powers necessary to accomplish all the objectives of a church of Christ. An independent church assumes that it is complete in and of itself, to the exclusion of all connection with other churches.

Our problem with this independency is that the Lord laid down in His Word a pattern of connected churches in which a wider government, composed of local elders, exercised authority over particular congregations. Independent churches face a problem when a local church lacks the necessary wisdom to solve a problem or a dispute. There is no provision or permission to appeal to others. The church is stuck and sometimes splits.

Another example shows how painful this can be. Former President Clinton is a Southern Baptist in good standing. He was caught in sin and deception. All over the Southern Baptist Church, pastors and people pleaded for and exhorted His local congregation to exercise church discipline over him. But His local congregation refused. And there was nothing the other churches could do about it. They are independent. There is no accountability beyond the local church.

But when you read the Bible, it is very different. There was a problem on the local level in Antioch. It could not be resolved there. But Acts 15 shows us that there was a right way to appeal the matter to an assembly of elders who settled the business.

One of the leading characteristics of Presbyterian Church government is that it entrusts the duty of ruling the church to the presbytery - that is, to the elders of the church in their assembled capacity. It means that churches do not have to stand alone. Instead, in unity, we can work together, in subjection to one another, to build up one another as parts of the whole.

That is the Presbyterian vision - one church of Jesus Christ, ruled by its assembled elders, however many congregations there may be in any place. Our vision is of the church in Houston being one Christian church ruled by its assembled elders. But, of course, we can't put that vision into place any further than we can persuade others to share it. And, in our day, in our city, there are not many like-minded Christians. We are a scattered and divided lot.

In older days, Presbyteries and Synods supported orphanages, poor people, and hospitals. These are some of the positive fruits when churches follow Biblical church government - when churches work together, in subjection to one another, to build up one another as parts of the whole. And this is part of our vision here at Crown & Covenant - to get to the point where we can plant churches that can work together to do what one congregation cannot do alone.

#### *Back to the Fourth Membership Vow-Submission to Government*

Ricky and Lucy nod. "I like the idea that we're related to each other in the Body of Christ. It means that we shouldn't be "loners." But I do have one more question. What does the word 'submit' mean in this membership vow?"

We explain that when you make this vow to God, you agree to submit yourself to the authority of the church. This is what the Bible teaches. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." On the one hand, the leaders nourish, care for, and build up the body. They disciple the people and feed the people from the Word of God and through prayer, just as we feed and care for our physical body. On the other hand, if a person becomes a problem member, the elders of the church will come to the person and talk to him about His wrong ideas or wrong behavior. Just as we would try to heal a wound on our finger, so the elders will try to intervene to help a wounded part of the body of Christ.

It sometimes does happen that we as Christians go off on a tangent; like sheep we go astray (Isa. 53:6). But we may not think that we have wandered because we are convinced that most if not all of our ways are right (Prov. 21:2: "All a man's ways seem right to him..."). And so we feel justified in what we are doing or teaching even if it is clear to others that as far as the Bible is concerned, we are wrong. Our natural tendency is to do what we see fit (Jdg. 21:25). We act as though Jesus were not our King.

Because Jesus cares for you, He won't let you wander off too far. He has appointed the elders to serve as overseers (I Pet. 5:2) and He has chosen to work through them. For Jesus' sake, you must be submissive to your elders (v. 5). This is vital to your spiritual welfare (Heb. 13:17). It is also the responsibility of your leaders to do all they can to see that you are submissive for Jesus' sake. They are commanded in Scripture by great patience and careful instruction to do all that God says is necessary to bring any one of us who strays back (I Tim. 4:2).

It is one of the hardest things in the world for any one of us to admit that we are wrong. We can see where others might be wrong, but our own ways really do seem right to us. We need to pray that the Lord will guide us with His counsel, not ours (Ps. 73:24). We need to be willing to humble ourselves before God (I Pet. 5:6).

If you do go astray, you may be tempted to tell the elders that you do not want to be under their oversight any longer. However, remember that when you join a church, you take a solemn vow to God Himself in the presence of His people that in case you should be found delinquent in what you believe or how you behave, you promise that you will heed the discipline they will use to try to bring you back to fellowship with the Lord and with His people. The purpose of taking such a vow is to help you be responsible and accountable. God takes your vow seriously, and He expects you to fulfill your vows.

Where the elders of a church fail to show the love of God in chastening or disciplining sin (the word “disciple” comes from “discipline”), uncorrected error takes over (Heb. 12:6). This is one of the main reasons so many churches have strayed from the faith. Had churches only shown to God's people the same love God does, there would be greater faithfulness. A neglect of discipline is a neglect of a very important part of love.

Loving discipline may require that a warning or admonition be given you if you start to go astray. We hope this will never happen. But knowing ourselves, we know our own frailty in this area. If you do not repent by turning back to the Lord, a rebuke may be necessary. If it becomes clear that you are out of fellowship with the Lord and His people, it may be that your privileges of taking Lord's Supper need to be suspended for a time. If after a long time of earnestly trying to reclaim you, you still persist in going your own way and show no evidence of faith in Jesus as your Savior, Head, and Lord, the Elders may have to remove you from the fellowship of the church - to excommunicate you. Only those who by their conduct show that they are sincere about following Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Head of the church belong in His church.

Certainly, we hope that none of these steps will need to be taken with you. One of the great aims of any true discipline is to teach self-discipline and to regain a straying brother or sister. Yet we know by personal experience how easy it is to get away from God. We know how hard it is to love him as we should. You should therefore be grateful to Christ that He cares enough for you not only to add you to His church but to do whatever is necessary to keep you from wandering off.

Thus, one of the things Ricky and Lucy will promise when they say “yes” to the fourth membership vow is that they will always welcome this expression of Christ's love through the church and submit to it.

King Jesus is ruling and building up His church. He is ruling and building up His church by His Word and Spirit. He is ruling and building up His church by His Word and Spirit through men serving in these biblical offices. May God grant us the grace to follow him all the more faithfully and all the more fruitfully. Amen.

*For Further Reading*

*Witheron, The Apostolic Church*

CHRISTIAN LIVING

*The Lordship of Christ*

The Bible says you must believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved, to be on good terms with God (Acts 1 6:31). Again, in Romans 10:9, 10, we read that you will receive salvation if you confess that Jesus is Lord. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:15, tells us that in our hearts, we must set apart Christ as Lord.

The point the Bible is making is that Jesus is not only Savior; He is also Lord. You can't say to Him, "I'll receive You as Savior, but won't have You as Lord." If you won't receive Him for who He is, you don't really receive him at all.

What does it mean to call Jesus Lord? Jesus answered this when He asked His disciples, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?" (Lk. 6:46). If you are going to call Jesus "Lord," you commit yourself to do what He says. You acknowledge that He has the right to tell you what to do, and you have the responsibility to do it. He will settle for nothing less than being Lord of your life, for having the highest lordship, the final say in every decision!

### **Jesus' Right to Lordship**

Does Jesus have the right to tell you what to do? Do you have the responsibility to do what He says? Does the salvation He gives you carry with it the responsibility to make it your concern to obey him?

Jesus once told His disciples, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am" (Jn. 13:13). What gives Jesus the right to such authority? In the first place, the Bible says that "through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn. 1:3). If parents, because they are parents, have a right to tell children what to do, how much more so our Creator!

Second, the Bible reminds us that one purpose of Jesus' death was that we who live should no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again (II Cor. 5:15). Gratitude and love for what Jesus did for us call for nothing less than loving willingness to do what He says. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will do what I command" (Jn. 14:15).

Third, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Mt. 28:18). What more could He have? Because He gave His life for us, the Bible says in Philippians 2:9-11, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father." Aren't these good reasons to be willing to bow to the authority of Jesus over you, to His lordship in your life?

### **How Extensive is Christ's Authority?**

Jesus' authority is great. It extends to every area of life. The Bible says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). An aim of our salvation is to make even every thought obedient to Christ (II Cor. 10:5). There is not an area of your life Jesus is not interested in, and in which He does not want you to trust him and do what He says! He wants you to trust His Lordship to the fullest.

Jesus sums up how great your commitment to His Lordship should be. He says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). Every activity of your heart needs to acknowledge and submit to His lordship. He wants you to be submissive and not rebellious even in your emotions and motivations! His great love calls for all your love.

Do you tend to rebel a little against the thought of God's unlimited right to your love? Realize that all God is calling you to do is to love him in the same way He loves you! God has not held back His love in any way from us. He even gave His Son to die in our place for our sins! Is it right that we should respond with any less love to him?

### **Love Calls for Service**

Love expresses itself in service. Jesus said, “if you love me, you will do what I command” (Jn. 14:15). Service is simply doing what God wants done. Doing what God wants done should be done with gladness (Ps. 100:2). Gathering together for the purpose of worship is one of the things God wants us to do (Ps. 96:9). That is why we often speak of public worship as a worship service.

Love expresses itself in service every day. God's Word is a full and helpful guide to the kind of life He wants you to live every day.

### **Jesus Calls for a New Allegiance**

Because Jesus is Lord, we are called to a new allegiance as well as to wholehearted service. Whose are you now? Are you your own person? The Bible says in (I Corinthians 6:19, 20, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” In II Corinthians 5:15, we are reminded that because Christ died for us, we should no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again. If you habitually disobey Him, don't you show that He does not have your allegiance?

The Bible says your allegiance should be to the Lord and not to the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17). It often uses the word “world” to describe people who are out of touch with heaven. The world disobeys God. It has no use for Him. It lives as though He were not real. Although we are in the world, we are not of the world (Jn. 17:16). God wants to live, then, as those whose allegiance is not to the world but to Him. To put it another way, you must forsake the world.

Many Christians become confused when they read in the Bible, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15). They are not clear as to what worldliness is. Some think of worldliness as the breaking of a set of pious taboos about going to the movies, smoking, playing cards, dancing, drinking wine occasionally, etc. Some of these actions may be inadvisable under certain circumstances. Smoking, for instance, can be injurious to health and so ought to be a matter carefully reviewed by any smoker. A person with an alcohol addiction should stay away from wine. However, to say that smoking or drinking are evidences of worldliness is not necessarily the case. It is conceivable, for instance, that for some people, even their attendance at church may be a matter of worldliness!

If in church, you let your mind wander and do not worship God, you are being worldly. If you say the Bible is not a good enough guide for living and believe you must add man-made commandments to it, you are being worldly. You are treating the Bible in the same way the world does (Col. 2:20-22). Worldliness refers to having the attitude the world has toward life. If you exhibit the same attitude the world does, you are being worldly.

Worldliness is having the attitude the world has toward God. Do not share that attitude, for if you love the world's point of view, how can you at the same time love God? The wickedness of a worldly person is described in Psalm 10:4: in all his thoughts there is no room for God. In Colossians 3:1, 2, we are reminded to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. You must set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. Indeed, how can you serve two masters? Make up your mind where your allegiance is and put it there (Mt. 6:24).

### *What Godliness Is*

The opposite of worldliness is godliness. As worldliness means to live as though only the world were really important, so godliness means to live as one who recognizes that it is God who is really important.

To have a godly attitude does not mean that you consider other things of no importance. Rather, it means that you see things in a new light. The things that are important to God now become important to you. Because you now love God, you start to look at things from His point of view. You are more aware of Him. You take a greater interest in trying to please Him.

#### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

##### *What is important to God?*

If godliness means to look at life from God's point of view, to count things as being important to us because they are important to God, how can you tell what things are important to Him?

Fortunately, God has not left us in the dark on this point. The Bible says that “His divine power has given everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and goodness” (II Pet. 1:3). God has given us these things in the Bible, His Word. They are summarized for us in a covenant God gave His people long ago (Dt. 4:13). This covenant is called the Ten Commandments.

God's Covenant, with its Ten Commandments, is a statement of what God considers important for us, who are now His people. He wants us to take His covenant seriously. His covenant law is His statement of His will for our life. What God wants for us is that in our lives and attitudes, we should become more like Jesus. He wants us to be godly. The Ten Commandments are, to put it another way, ten marks of godliness.

God's covenant law has not been abolished for us who live in this New Covenant age. Paul makes this clear when, after asking whether we nullify the law by our faith in Jesus, he answers; “Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31).

Some object to God's law because they think it is so negative. Yet, even though eight of the ten commandments are introduced by the words, “You shall not,” the Bible calls it the law that gives liberty (Jam. 2:12). The reason for this is not that the obeying of the law will save us, for once broken, no amount of obedience can give us a perfect standing with God. Rather, the reason is that in stating certain commandments in a “You shall not” form, God is in effect saying to those in a covenant relationship with Him through faith in Jesus, “You have full freedom to do whatever you want to only you shall not do such and such.” To have permission from God Himself to do whatever you want with only eight exceptions is real freedom!

##### *Putting God First is a First Mark of Godliness*

The first mark of godliness is, “You shall have no other Gods before me” (Dt. 5:7). The essence of godliness is to give God Himself first place in your life. How difficult this is! And yet how essential. Personal convenience, job responsibilities, opportunities, other people's opinions, secret ambitions, and many other things often occupy the major part of our time, our thought, and our energy. Is God consistently given first place in your decisions and affections? Do you long for God as the psalmist does in Psalm 42:1, 2? He says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” Do you experience such desires? Pray that God will help you have them.

Incidentally, remember that the other side of every responsibility is a privilege. For instance, just as it is a responsibility to vote, so is it a privilege. See then the privilege in this first great mark of godliness. Our great privilege as Christians is to be able to understand and know God (Jer. 9:23, 24). Do you know Him? Can you call Him your God?

### *Worshiping God His Way is a Second Mark of Godliness*

The second mark of godliness the Ten Commandments call attention to is worshiping God in His way, not ours. He wants you to worship Him in the way He has taught us in His Word.

God says that godliness in worship means not to make for yourself an idol (picture or image) of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath with the purpose of bowing down to it or worshiping it or otherwise using it as an “aid to worship” (Dt. 5:8-10).

God feels very strongly about this, and with good reason. No image or picture made by man can give a true idea of God. “God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). God cannot be seen; He is invisible (I Tim. 1:17). To make a visible representation of the invisible God is to tell a lie about Him. It is to present Him as if He were someone He is not, to create a false god. True worship is to praise God for who He is, not for who He isn't. Godly worship is praising God as He makes Himself known in the Bible.

If your responsibility in worship as well as in all of life is to be guided by God's Word, think of the privilege it is to have the Word of God Himself to guide you! Where could you get finer, more reliable guidance? (Ps. 119:130; II Pet. 1:3).

### *Respecting God's Name is a Third Mark of Godliness*

The third mark of godliness the Ten Commandments give has to do with not misusing God's name (Dt 5:11). You misuse His name when you use it for no good purpose. Obviously, if you consider God important, you will respect Him. You will take Him seriously. If you use His name carelessly and therefore disrespectfully, you show He is not important to you. Since it is commonplace today to use the name of God or Christ as a meaningless exclamation, this mark is a timely reminder that godliness calls for a real love and respect for God, always.

When you use God's name, are you not asking Him to pay attention to you? In prayer, then, be careful that you do not take God's name to no good purpose by praying but not really meaning what you say or by not believing God is listening. Do you remember Aesop's fable about the lonely shepherd who cried, “Wolf”?

Also, when you believe in Jesus, are you not called a Christian (Acts 11:26)? Are you not called by His name? He asks you never, by your misconduct, to bear His name in a dishonorable way.

Consider the amazing privileges granted in this mark of godliness. Just as a wife takes on her husband's name, so God is willing to identify you as His very own by letting you be called by His name! More than that, He listens to you because He is near us when we pray! (Dt. 4:7) What more could you want?

### *Treating God's Day as Special is a Fourth Mark of Godliness*

The fourth mark of godliness the Ten Commandments draw attention to is keeping the Sabbath day holy (Dt. 5:12-15). The word “Sabbath” means “rest.” In Old Covenant times, the seventh day was the day of rest. In New Covenant times, the Apostles and the Christian Church observed the first day of the week as the day when they would come together and break bread, that is, eat together and very likely observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). It was even called the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). It was the day on which the Lord Jesus arose from death.

God wants you to keep the Day of Rest holy. He wants you to treat it as a special day because He says it is special to Him. Anything God sets apart for His special purposes is holy. He wants you to treat the whole Sabbath day, all day, as a special day, important to the Lord and, for that reason, to you.

Just as in Old Covenant times, God called the day the “Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Ex. 2:10), so Jesus, in this New Covenant age says that as Son of Man, He is (not was) the Lord even of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:38). The Sabbath or Rest Day is not your day to use as you please anymore than the time an employee gives his employer at work is his own to use as he pleases. The Sabbath is the Lord's Day. Because it is so easy to forget, God wants you to remember to keep and use the day as His day, not yours.

Why should you treat the Sabbath day as a special day for God? Certainly, the basic reason is because God wants you to. He has good cause for wanting you to. By giving you a weekly rest day, He is giving you the opportunity to rest from the regular work it is proper to do in the remaining six days.

The big reason; however, is that God wants to remind you that your time, your life, even your enjoyment in life, come from Him. If it were not for His mercy, we would be in an awful mess (Dt. 5:15). How easy it is to forget these things! To keep us from taking the privilege of life, with all its blessings, for granted, God calls us to use the day He has appointed to be a Day of Rest as a weekly reminder that our times are in His hands (Ps. 31:15).

God gives a useful principle in Exodus 20:11 (cf. Jn. 5:16-17) to help us understand what He wants us to do on His day. It is this: “What is right for God is right for us.” What is right for God to do on His six great days of creative work is right for us to do on the six days of our week that He has set aside for our creative work. What is right for Him to do on His great rest day is right for us to do on the day in the week He has set aside for us for our Sabbath, our rest.

How does this principle give needed guidance? To be guided by this principle, find out from the Bible the kinds of things God does during His great rest period, the day that began at the end of creation and which, according to Hebrews 4:1-11, is still in progress. You can then be sure that what is right for God during His great period of rest is right for us, too. His activity is our example.

There are at least six major kinds of activities that God calls for or does during His great eternal rest period. These should be our guides.

The first activity God calls for and approves of on the Day of Rest is worship. God calls for and is worshiped during His great Sabbath Rest. It is proper, then, for us to worship Him during our weekly rest day.

Second, God shows mercy during His great rest day. It was after God had begun His day of rest that Adam and Even sinned. He nevertheless put into action His whole plan of salvation and graciously showed them mercy. He continues to do so to us during this great age of His rest. It is therefore necessary that we also should show mercy. When Jesus healed a person on the Sabbath, He pointed out in John 5:16, 17 that He was following this principle of doing on the weekly Sabbath what His father is doing on His great one.

Third, as we read in I John 1:3, God has fellowship with us during His great day of rest. Therefore, He wants us to have fellowship with Him and with one another. Make it a special point to see to it that your fellowship on the Sabbath is with others who trust Him too.

A fourth type of activity, if we may call it that, that God does during His great Sabbath period is rest (Gen. 2: 1). God wants you also to be rested and to rest from your labors.

A fifth activity God engages in, and therefore we may, is enjoying creation (Gen. 1:31). In this, however, be careful to use your enjoyment to help you remember and enjoy God, not to forget Him.

A sixth activity God does during His great rest period needs a little more discussion. Hebrews 1:3 says that during this present age of God's rest, Jesus upholds all things by His powerful word. That is, He does whatever is necessary to keep His creation from falling into chaos. In like manner, then, it is appropriate for us, during our weekly rest day, to do whatever is necessary to keep life from falling into chaos. Again, keep asking yourself the question "is what I am thinking of doing really necessary?" Avoid the temptation to see what you can get away with.

Ungodliness shows itself today in stores being open on the Lord's day, in businesses insisting that a person work on the Sabbath, in recreation facilities enticing people to give only an hour or two, instead of the whole day, to the Lord, spending the rest of the day as if it were our own and not special to the Lord. It is difficult to live a godly life in such an environment.

Are you careless about the Lord's Day? Do you live just as ungodly people do, patronizing stores, doing unnecessary work, forgetting God and His Grace to you? If you cannot remember to honor and enjoy God on His special day, how difficult you make it for yourself to enjoy Him the rest of the week! The sobering thought is this: if you cannot learn to enjoy God enough now to want to spend the time He gives you to do so, do you suppose you will really enjoy heaven, when all your time will be spent in the awareness of His special presence?

If you have children, a good way to help them learn about the Lord's Day is to impress on them two basic concepts. The first is that the day is a different day from other days of the week. This can be taught by letting little children play with "Sunday toys," not necessarily better toys but ones they do not get to play with on other days. Older children can be taught that homework is not to be done on the Lord's Day because it is a regular work activity for the rest of the week and should not be done then.

Second, teach the children to remember why the day is different. Ask them on Saturday why Sunday is a different day. Teach them to answer that it is a different day because it is the Lord's Day and not their own.

When tempted to give in to the practice of those who have little use for God, ask yourself the question as to who really is your Lord and whom you will serve. Observing the Sabbath as a day belonging not to yourself but to the Lord will help you remember. Be concerned to please God no matter what the cost. Remember, ungodly persons will not enter into the Lord's Kingdom and presence (I Cor. 6:9).

How gracious God is to give a day for rest! It speaks of His great concern that we may enjoy life even in a world under His curse because of sin (Gen. 3:17-19). Consider also how concerned He is that we have time to learn to enjoy Him here! He wants heaven to be heaven for you!

#### *Respect for Authority is a Fifth Mark of Godliness*

The fifth mark of godliness is respect for authority, especially that of our father and mother (Dt. 5:16).

An ungodly spirit expresses itself in rebelliousness. When children talk back to parents, or employees defy employers, or students insist on being disrespectful to teachers, or professing Christians refuse to submit to the oversight of the elders of their church, they are being ungodly. How contrary this is to godliness!

All authority comes from God. If you do not respect the authority of those God in His providence has placed over you, you are defying God Himself. "He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Rom. 13:2). Godliness involves a necessary respect for the authority of God.

Respect for authority starts at home. Children must acknowledge it. Parents must insist upon it, for God does. It is essential to godliness. Disrespect is one of the most serious sins of a child. If you do not respect God's authority, you will not be privileged to spend eternity in God's Promised Land (Dt. 5:16).

What would life be like in a world where there was no respect for authority? How gracious God is to establish lines of authority so that we may live safe and peaceable lives!

#### *Respect for Life is a Sixth Mark of Godliness*

The sixth mark of godliness is respect for life. God said, "You shall not murder" (Dt. 5:17). The word used in the Hebrew means "murder," and not just killing. Murder is different from killing; it is the unauthorized destroying of a life. Murder is committed when someone takes it into His own hands to destroy the life of another without authorization from the lawful authorities. Civil rulers receive their authority from God (Rom. 13:1). God, who alone has the right to dispose of life, has given directions in the Bible as to when the rulers of a land must take the life of a law-breaker. God requires execution for premeditated murder (Gen. 9:5-6).

Jesus pointed out that godliness not only calls for abstaining from murder but even from thoughts that lead to murder. He said that if you harbor improper anger, resentment and hatred in your heart, you are as truly ungodly as a person who actually carries out those thoughts in the act of murder. Carrying out the thoughts aggravates the sin. Do you indulge resentment to build up your pride and make yourself feel superior to another? Such thoughts and attitudes are ungodly. God calls you, if you say you love Him, to love your brothers also (I Jn. 4:21). The mark of a Christian is showing love to one another (Jn. 13:35). What a privilege it is to have God, who created humans in His own image, make arrangements to see that our life is respected! We should be concerned that the lives of the not-yet-born be protected too.

#### *Respect for Sex and Marriage is the Seventh Mark of Godliness*

The Bible's seventh mark of godliness is respect for sex and marriage. God said, "You shall not commit adultery" (Dt. 5:18).

Adultery is unfaithfulness to your promise, whether the promise to your marriage partner or to God. It is God who joins together a man and woman in marriage. Two people so joined must not be separated by divorce (Mt. 19:6). Divorce, except on the grounds given in the Bible, is a breaking-up of the God joined relationship of marriage (Mt. 19:9; 1Cor. 7:15).

If you have sexual relationships before or outside of marriage, you show you despise the relationship God has established. You show also that you despise God, who established the relationship. They are marks of ungodliness. To preserve yourself from the temptation to destroy your marriage, you - if you are the husband or wife - need to learn to love and respect one another (Eph.

5:33). God wants you to remember that you are to flee from sexual immorality (1Cor. 6:18). Remember that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own, but were bought at a price. Therefore, you must honor God with your body (1 Cor. 5:19, 20).

Godliness calls for faithfulness to one another and to God for God's sake. Would you want God to be less than faithful to His promises to you? Remember His faithfulness to you and strive to be faithful in all you promise.

### *Respect of Property is the Eighth Mark of Godliness*

Refusing to steal is the Bible's eighth mark of godliness (Dt. 5:19). Stealing springs from being so dissatisfied with the way God has distributed possessions to you and others that you feel you must take matters into your own hands and do some redistributing.

All things come from God (1 Chr. 29:14). He has the final say in how they are to be used. We are therefore only caretakers, trustees, managers of what God has given us. We are not the owners; God is. You are therefore to be responsible to Him in how you use what you have. Use your possessions as He directs in His Word.

An important area where even Christians often steal from God is mentioned by the prophet Malachi in Malachi 3:8-10. In that passage, God accused those who did not bring the whole tithe into His storehouse of robbing Him (Mal. 3:8-10). (The word "tithe" is an old English word that means the one-tenth part.)

Tithing existed long before the Ten Commandments were given. The New Testament mentions with approval that even Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the plunder he reclaimed from marauding kings (Heb. 7:4; Gen. 14:18-20). Jacob also made a commitment to give God a tenth of all God would give him (Gen. 28:20-22).

God points out that tithing is a mark of godliness. If you practice it, you will find it is not a burden but a blessing. When King David gave an enormous gift to God, and all the people with him, all rejoiced at the generous response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD (1 Chr. 29:9). God promises to bless in amazing ways, and does bless, those who bring the whole tithe to Him (Mal. 3:10).

The reason God says so much about tithing is not that He needs what you have. What could be a more ridiculous thought than that! (Ps. 50:9-12). Rather, the reason was given by Jesus when He said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:21). How true! Too often we keep our hearts from God because we keep our treasure from Him! God does not need your treasure. Rather, He wants your heart. Because your heart is inseparably connected to your treasure, the only way to get your heart is to call for your treasure too. Yet, instead of depriving you by this means, God blesses you beyond what you could imagine! You come out the winner!

As mentioned, the word "tithe" means the one-tenth part, a significant portion of your income. God asks for such a significant portion because He wants a significant part of your life. Is this not what godliness is all about? Godliness is simply recognizing God as the really important One in your life. Are you going to let your possessions keep you from God? Why not rather, with joy and faith, use them as an encouragement to greater commitment to Him?

The secret of tithing is what is at the heart of godliness: it is simply putting God first. When you receive your income and start paying your bills, instead of waiting to the end to see if there is enough

left over for God, which is treating Him like a beggar, set aside God's portion first, then pay the rest. You may be surprised to see how faithful God is to keep His promise to bless when you put Him first!

What a privilege it is to be able to have things we can treat as our own because we know God has let us have them! What a privilege to know that God knows our needs, and provides for us in ways that will keep our hearts on Him!

Agur says in Proverbs 30:8, 9, says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

#### *A Ninth Mark of Godliness is Respect for the Truth*

The Bible's ninth mark of godliness is refusing to give false witness against your neighbor (Dt. 5:20). Witnessing is simply telling what you know to be true. Whether on the witness stand in court or on the telephone with a friend, if you are a godly person, you will protect the reputation of your neighbor. You will speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). How easy it is to say unkind and unnecessary things about others" tearing them down because you think it shows you off in a better light! Has not God delighted to cover your sins and not bring them to mind for the sake of Christ? Delight to do for others what God has done for you! (1 Pet. 4:8).

If you should not bear a false testimony against your neighbor, you should also not bear false testimony against God. You can bear false testimony about Him by saying nothing about your thankfulness to Him, or about what He has done for you through Jesus when you have an opportunity to do so. We witness about things we are thankful for, happy about, and think are important. If you are silent, does not this expose your real attitude toward Jesus? By being silent, you make it appear as though God has nothing to do with bringing you your blessings. What do you personally know about what God has done for you through faith in Jesus?

Jesus said that with the power of the Holy Spirit, we would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). If you really are saved by Christ, will you be able NOT to bring him, and what you are grateful to him for, into your conversation? Witnessing is a natural mark of godliness.

Witnessing about Christ is an essential mark of godliness. If you are not witnessing, you must ask yourself whether you really know Christ. One reason many who profess to be Christians do not witness is that they are ashamed of Christ and of His words (Mk. 8:38). Are you afraid of what you think other people will think if you witness about Jesus?

Notice what Jesus says of you, if through shame, you are by your silence bearing a false witness about him. "If anyone is ashamed of Me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mk 8:38). Even more specifically, He says, "Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown before my Father in heaven" (Mt. 10:33).

Imagine what life would be like if you could not trust God! God is the God of truth. Do you expect Him to be true to you? What a privilege it is to be able to count on God! He wants to be able to count on you too.

#### *Saying NO to Wrong Desires is a Tenth Mark of Godliness*

The Bible's tenth mark of godliness is refusing to covet or set your desire on your neighbor's wife or possessions (Dt. 5:21). God wants you to say NO to wrong desires, whether it is the desire you

could have toward the caring, understanding, easy-to-get-along-with spouse of a friend or for items you don't have but would dearly love to have. Coveting is a desire that has gotten out of hand. It has become the big thing in your life. Do not set your heart on persons or things God will not let you have. Rather, learn to be content (Phil. 4:11). "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).

Contentment is not a grudging resignation to conditions beyond your control. It is a positive happy resting in God and what He provides in His love and Grace. It is having God in view. The psalmist expressed it beautifully when he said, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And being with You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25, 26).

How good God is to command us not to set our hearts on worthless things! (Ps. 119:37). When we do, He often takes steps to remind us how worthless some things are. It is contentment that brings happiness! Many want to become rich because they think money can get them anything they want, including happiness. Actually, greediness robs a person of happiness for he is never satisfied but always wants more. A person who is content is the one who is really rich and happy. He feels he has everything His heart could desire!

Is God your portion? Would you be content if you had nothing beside Him? Why not be content then, when you have Him, and so much beside?

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE

### *The Difficulty of Dedication*

Do you have trouble trying to live a godly life? Do you sometimes despair because you have problems with even wanting to please God all the time? Why can't we live a dedicated godly life as we should?

There are several reasons for the struggles we have. One is the great trouble that Satan, the Devil, gives us. We read that we must be self-controlled and alert. Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. We must resist him, standing firm in the faith (1 Pet 5:8, 9). Never underestimate the subtlety and power of Satan! Only with Jesus' help can you resist the devil effectively. The devil catches you when you think you are strongest. It is at that point you are apt to trust more in your own progress than in Christ's power. The Bible warns, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Another reason why godly living is such a problem is the great influence the world has on us. We call it peer pressure. The world lives as though God were not important or even real. When you live with this influence all around you, it is easy to absorb the same attitude. The opinions and attitudes of others influence us more than we like to think. We forget our Lord.

The answer to worldliness is a positive setting of your hearts on things that are above where Christ is. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things (Col. 3:1-3). Learn to delight yourself in the Lord. When you do, He will give you Himself, the one your heart desires (Ps. 37:4).

Do not, however, exclusively lay the blame for your difficulty in loving God on outside influences. Although you may be under pressure from the devil and from the world, nevertheless it is you yourself who in the last analysis gives in (James 1:13-14). It is you who sins. It is you who is ungodly. The problem lies in us ourselves, in the flesh.

### *What About Your Inward Struggle?*

The Bible reminds us that we have had a lot of practice at being ungodly! It has all been by our choice. Practice has built strong habits. Strong habits are hard to break. When you became a Christian, God gave you a new nature. Yet your old ways and habits, what you did “naturally,” still persist. Because of this, there is a struggle between your new nature and the old ways you have strengthened so long by your habits before coming to Christ.

The struggle between your old anti-Christian way of doing things and your new Christian nature is a life-and-death one. As one who now wants to please God, you want to do good yet your old habits and your old attitudes toward the desires your body raises in you make you want to do wrong. As a result, you find out that what you do is not the good you want to do. Rather, the evil you do not want to do - this you keep on doing (Rom. 7:19). Paul, the great mature Christian and Apostle, admits, “In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Rom. 7:22, 23). “What a wretched man I am!” he cries out. “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24).

With thankfulness, we can acknowledge with Paul that the one who delivers us is God, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:25). Only by the power of God, received through faith in the Lord Jesus, will you be able more and more to get the upper hand in this life-and-death struggle between your new nature and the old habits and desires you used to do naturally. Aim to do nothing less than put our old ways to death, to mortify them, as it is sometimes said. The only way to do so is to keep at it with God's help. Through prayer, get God's help to establish the habit of believing and doing what He in His Word wants you to do.

### *There is Joy in Commitment*

Commitment has always been unpopular. Are you afraid of commitment? How tragic if you are! If you are unwilling to commit yourself to someone, you will be unable to love that person. You will never know the joy that comes from committing yourself in love!

Love involved commitment. Love is a commitment. Love to God involved your committing yourself to Him. It involves committing yourself to Jesus for salvation. It involves committing yourself to Jesus as your Lord and as your Head in the church.

Without commitment, you can have no joy. God's call is a call to commitment and, therefore, to joy. Will you commit yourself, your ways, and your all to Him?

“Commit your way to the Lord: trust also in him and he will bring it to pass.” (Ps. 37:5).

### WHAT IS CHRISTIAN LIBERTY?

“Christian liberty” refers to the freedom that Christians have to choose in the area of doctrine or ethics where the Bible is not explicit. There are many things that God has not revealed to us in the Scriptures. We believe He expects Christians to make responsible choices in these areas, guided by Biblical principles and the Holy Spirit. The issue of Christian liberty is an important one because some churches seek to “bind the conscience” of Christians by forcing them to adhere to doctrines or obey rules that are not commanded in Scripture. These are usually based rather on tradition or misinterpretations of Scripture, not explicit commands. Another reason it is important to understand the concept of Christian liberty is that Christians tend to differ about so many things (e.g. standards of dress, what entertainment is acceptable, beverage use of alcohol, Lord's Day keeping, eschatology,

baptism, Bible versions, etc.). If we don't understand this concept, we could become either pharisaical, condemning those who do not have our standards, or irresponsible, just doing what we want regardless of how it affects others.

### *Distinguish between Commands and Traditions*

We must determine if our conviction in an area is based on a clear command of Scripture or rather our own or church's determination of what is right. In Paul's day, one issue that divided Christians was whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:4). Another was the question of vegetarianism (Rom 14:2) and another, the keeping of Jewish "holy days" (Rom 14:5). In His treatment of these controversies, Paul makes it clear that these are activities that are not good or bad in themselves but rather are areas in which a Christian has liberty to make His own choice (Rom 14:14, 20; 1 Cor. 8:9; 9:4-6; 10:23, 29). So, the first thing to do is to determine if something is in the area of a command or a tradition. Am I doing or believing this thing because it is clearly and unmistakably taught in Scripture or because my church or my own tradition favors it?

### *How to Decide What to Do*

It must be pointed out that although God has not given us direct commands or prohibitions on every detail of life, He has given us precepts and principles that touch on every area. When trying to determine what is right or the best thing to do, these questions should be asked:

Is it lawful (1 Cor. 10:23)? Has God strictly forbidden it? If so, the case is closed. Does it edify (10:23)? Does it build me up spiritually, physically and emotionally? Is it profitable to others (10:33)? Will it help those around me? Will it offend others (10:23)? Will it glorify God (10:31), make Him happy, make others think highly of Him? Is it worth imitating (11: 1)? Does it set a good example to follow? Is it something you could imagine Christ doing (11:1)? Am I sure that it will not enslave me (6:12)? Am I controlled by it?

If you can honestly answer all these questions in the affirmative, then do it and don't feel guilty.

### *How to Respond to Others*

In regard to others who have differing convictions from us in nonessential areas, there are two things to remember.

First, we should not condemn them (Rom 14:3, 13). We should allow them to have their own personal convictions. Paul says we should "accept" or welcome them as brethren (14:1). Our fellowship is not based on uniformity of opinion but on unity in relationships (14:17).

Second, we should temper our liberty by love. If what I am doing becomes a "stumbling block" to another Christian, I should stop doing it or at least not flaunt it to his detriment (1 Cor. 8:9-12; Rom 14:13). Love for others, not self-edification, should be the supreme guiding principle of our lives (Rom. 15:1-3). We should seek peace and mutual edification and not make a "big deal" about minor issues (Rom. 14:19).

May God grant us the wisdom to discern God's will for us in regard to areas of liberty and the grace to accept others who hold to different convictions.

## WHAT IS OUR POSITION ON THE “CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT”?

### *Concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*

Baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by Joel and other prophets in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28, 29; Isa. 32:15; 59:21; Ez. 36:26, 27) as well as by John the Baptist and our Lord in the New Testament (Jn. 7:37-39; Mt. 3:11; Lk. 24:9; Acts 1:4-8; Jn. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26, 16:7-16). It found its fulfillment at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). While public and external manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on occasion in the Apostolic Age (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 19:6, 7), Scripture teaches that the normal experience of the Spirit's baptism coincides with regeneration (Tit. 3:5; Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:5; 8:9; I Cor. 12:13). It is therefore not to be viewed as a second blessing or a special work of Grace enjoyed by some but not all Christians (I Cor. 12:3; Rom. 8:9-10; 1 Jn. 4:2). Every Christian received the Holy Spirit completely, not partially, when He received Christ as Savior.

### *Concerning the Life in the Spirit*

Life in the Spirit begins with regeneration (Col. 2:13; Jn. 3:3-9; Eph. 2:1-5). The first manifestation of this life is the believer's calling on the name the Lord for salvation (Rom. 10:13-14; Gen. 4:26; Joel 2:32; I Cor. 12:3). Assurance of salvation is not based on any experience but on the Word of God that promises eternal life to all who believe (II Pet. 1:17-19; Psa. 19:7; Jn. 17:7, 8, 14, 17; 20:31; Eph. 2:8, 9; Heb. 11:6; 1 Jn. 5:13, 18-20). This assurance is to be cultivated by the continual and diligent use of God's means for our growth in Grace: the Word, prayer, fellowship, baptism, and the Lord's Supper (Phil. 2:12, 13; Acts 2:41, 42; II Pet. 1:3-11).

### *Concerning the Filling of the Spirit*

The filling of the Spirit denotes the dominion of Christ in our lives and occurs when one is led willingly by the Word through which the Spirit works (Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:4, 13, 14; Gal. 3:3; 5:16, 17). By their subjection to the Word of Scripture, believers grow in Grace and receive the benefits of redemption freely through Christ (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16, 17). The evidence of this spiritual growth is seen in the fruit of the Spirit, which is proof of their abiding in Christ and His Word abiding in them (Jn. 15:4-7; Gal. 5:22, 23; Eph. 5:18-21). By the filling of the Spirit, they are enabled to speak the truth of Christ with great boldness (Acts 4:13).

The Scripture commands every Christian to be filled continually by the Holy Spirit and to grow spiritually by obedience to God's Written Word and the proper use of the means of Grace (Acts 2:41, 42; Mt. 28:18-20, Eph. 5:18). When we neglect or ignore His Word or are disobedient to it, we are guilty of quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25-30; 1 Thess. 5:19-22).

### *Concerning the Gifts of the Spirit*

Spiritual gifts are granted to every believer by the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each Christian “individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4). Christians are to use these gifts to serve Christ in the work of His Kingdom and for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 14:12). All true believers receive some spiritual gift or gifts (1 Cor. 12:7). No spiritual gift is to be despised, nor is it to be misused to bring glory to any other than to God (Jn. 16:14; 1 Cor. 10:31; 12:21; 13:1-3). Specific spiritual gifts noted in Scripture are found in the following passages: Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; Eph. 4:11-15.

## **Miracles**

Much discussion and debate continue throughout the church of Christ on the subject of miracles. In the Scripture, certain clusters of miracles were associated with various servants of God and related

to the giving of revelation, such as Exodus 4:1-9; 1 Kings 17:23-24; John 2:11; 3:2. Such miracles were signs by which God communicated divine truth or confirmed that the speaker indeed spoke from God. These miracles related to revelation have ceased because revelation was completed with the closing of the Canon in the New Testament era.

Scripture also uses the term “miracle” or “wonder” to describe the acts of God in all areas of creation and providence (Ps. 107:23, 24; 139:14). The power of God in response to believing prayer to work wonders and to heal the sick cannot be limited (Jam. 5:14-16).

Finally, we would speak a word of caution against obsession with signs and miraculous manifestations, which is not indicative of a healthy church but of the opposite (Mt. 12:39; 24:24; Jn. 4:48; I Cor. 1:22, 23; 1 4:22; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). The Spirit provides all that is necessary for the equipping of the saints through His presence and power in the church (2 Tim.3:16, 1 7, Lk. 16:31, Jn. 14:16, 17; 16:7-16; I Cor. 12:1-11; 13:1- 1 4:1. Gal. 5:22-23). The true basis of faith and spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit in believers as they are made subject to His written Word, which is sufficient in itself for spiritual growth to complete maturity.

### **Tongues**

It is evident that tongues described in Acts 2 were foreign languages known to the hearers present. Tongues were a special sign to the Jews that the new age of the gospel had begun (I Cor. 14:20-22; Isa. 28:11, 12; Acts 2:4, 38; 10:46; II Cor. 12:12). Tongues were used as a means by God to reveal His will to early New Testament Churches (I Cor. 1 2:14). It should be noted that few believers in the New Testament spoke in tongues (Acts 2:38, 41; 3:7-9; 4:4; I Cor. 12:10), and those who received the gift did not seek it (Acts 1:5; 2:33; 1 Cor. 12:11, 18). Any view of tongues that conceives of it as an experience by which revelation is received from God is contrary to the finalized character of Scripture. In addition, any view of tongues that makes this an essential sign of baptism of the Spirit is contrary to Scripture (Eph. 5:18-21). Today's tongues movement seems to have little in common with the New Testament gift of tongues, which itself began to fade as Scripture was completed (I Cor. 13:7-13).

### **Healing**

God still miraculously heals sickness in response to believing prayer and confession (Jam. 5:15, 1 6). But it is not always God's will to heal His stricken children. He sometimes uses illness to chasten or to develop Christ-like character in His people (Heb. 12:6; II Cor. 12:7-10). The “gift of healing” was a special sign-gift given to the apostles to authenticate their message during the apostolic age (II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4; cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). It was not a permanent gift (Phil. 2:30; 2 Tim. 4:20, etc.). Since the passing of the apostles, the authentication of the gospel is not by miraculous signs, which today are often fraudulent or Satanically induced, (Mt. 7:22; 1 Cor. 13:1; Gal. 5:22; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Rev. 13:3; Mt. 12:24) but by the signs of the resurrection (Mt. 12:39; Rom. 1:4) and the transformed lives of believers (II Cor. 5:17; Jn. 13:35; II Cor. 3:2; Tit. 2:10).

## **SECONDARY DISTINCTIVES HELD BY OUR CHURCH**

### **WE BELIEVE THAT GOD CREATED THE EARTH IN SIX CONSECUTIVE DAYS**

We believe that any position that denies a recent creation in six calendar days or results in death before the Fall, is out of accord with the Bible and the Confessions. Examples of such positions include: theistic evolution, uniformitarian geology, the Framework Hypothesis, and the Analogical Day View.

### **WE REJECT THE RIGHT OF THE STATE TO CONTROL THE AFFAIRS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

The Constitution of the United States forbids the State to establish a Church. And yet, by incorporating and applying for tax-exempt status, local churches voluntarily place themselves under

the jurisdiction and authority of state and federal governments. The net effect is that the ability of the Church to be what John Adams called the “moral compass of the nation” is hindered when local churches believe that they must uphold governmental policies and positions. A warning to the Church was given by the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Bob Jones University v. United States* (461 U.S. 574), when it asserted that an exempt organization must “demonstrably serve and be in harmony with the public interest,” must have a purpose that comports with “the common community conscience,” and must not act in a manner “affirmatively at odds with [the] declared position of the whole Government.” Obviously, the Court believes that churches and other religious organizations that file for tax-exempt status implicitly agree to act on behalf of the Government.

#### WE PRACTICE MALE HEAD-OF-HOUSEHOLD VOTING

While there is no difference, qualitatively, between male and female, in the writings of the Apostle Paul, in particular, we find that God has preserved the distinction between male and female roles in both the family and in the church. Men are commanded to sacrificially lead their families and the Body of Christ, while women are forbidden from exercising authority over men in the church. Since men are responsible for the conduct of their families and since voting is an exercise of authority we practice one vote per household, cast by the male head-of-household.

#### WE ENCOURAGE THE ENTIRE FAMILY TO WORSHIP TOGETHER

Wherever we find the family gathered for worship in Scripture, it is the family in its totality: father, mother, and child. In our judgment, nursery care, and youth ministries retard the maturation and self-discipline of our children. The cumulative effect of these programs has been to train children to be entertained at church and diminish the role of the father and mother in the spiritual training of their children. We believe worshipping as a family accomplishes the following worthy goals: 1) it allows children to share in and experience the corporate worship of God’s people; 2) it eliminates the artificial “teen culture” which can bring peers into competition with parents or weaken the relationship between children and parents; and 3) it most closely matches Biblical patterns of corporate worship.

#### WE REQUIRE AN EDUCATED ELDERSHIP

Far too many churches ordain men to be elders on the basis of their success in the business world or personal charisma, without regard to the Elder qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In addition to other qualifications, elders must have the ability to teach the Word of God and protect the Church from false doctrine. We believe that this ability arises only from a thorough knowledge of Scripture as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we require that all Elders of member churches possess a seminary degree or have sufficient knowledge to pass a thorough theological examination by the Presbytery.

#### WE BELIEVE GOD GIVES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TRAINING OUR CHILDREN TO PARENTS

The Bible gives parents the clear direction in Deuteronomy 6 that they are to train their children in the statutes of the Lord throughout the day. This mandate is compromised when children are sent to government institutions of learning where they are indoctrinated contrary to scripture and influenced by ungodly peers and teachers. We promote, instead, those educational alternatives which are guided by and serve Biblical principles and purposes.

#### SUMMARY

We have been able to touch only on highlights of the Reformed faith. The “Reformed faith” is nothing other than consistent Biblical Christianity embraced as an entire world-and-life view, a life-system. One author summarizes its genius like this: to be Reformed is to be fully Trinitarian in theology and catholic (cosmic or universal) in vision. (John Bolt).

Personal commitment to every position outlined in this overview is not required for membership with Crown & Covenant. We believe and embrace the doctrine of liberty of conscience, which allows room for differing doctrinal interpretations. Deviation with specific points of doctrine is not a reason for separation and should not be used as a means of dividing the church. Nevertheless, we want you to understand these important and fundamental positions which define the teaching and preaching of this body. We should all strive to better understand and apply the Word of God to our lives.

For Further Study

*G.I. Williamson, The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide*

*G.I. Williamson, The Westminster Shorter Catechism: A Study Guide*

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## OUR CHURCH HISTORY

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### BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH HISTORY

Here is an outline of church History since the New Testament:

- Early Church Period - A.D. 30-590
  - Apostolic Period (30-100)-Apostles alive, miracles
  - Post-Apostolic (100-150)-Apologists
  - Conflict with Roman Empire (150-313}-Persecution
  - Growth of Old Catholic Imperial Church (313-590}-Constantine 313; 476-fall of West
- Medieval Church Period-A.D. 590-1517
  - Christianity in the West (590-1054)-westward expansion, papacy, rise of the “Roman” Catholic Church, split of 1054
  - Golden Age of Papal Power (1054-1305}-Crusades, Precursors of Reformation
  - Early movement toward Reformation (1305-1517) — Wycliffe, Huss, Savanarola
- Modern Period-A.D. 1517-Present
  - Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) — Luther, Calvin, Knox (the rediscovery of the gospel and reformation of the truly one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church)
  - Counter Reformation (1546-1648)-Jesuits, the council of Trent (the hardened choice of apostasy and the birth of what we today call the “Roman Catholic Church”), the Inquisition
  - Colonial Christianity and Revival (1658-1789}-Colonies, Great Awakening
  - Christian Expansion in Britain and America (1789-1914} — 2nd Awakening, Rationalism
  - The Church in the Post Christian Era (1914-Present}-Modernist-fundamentalist controversy, ecumenicity, Neo-orthodoxy, charismatic movement, evangelical resurgence

### CPC HISTORY

The Covenant Presbyterian Church is part of a continuing witness to Christ that has continued to build on the foundation laid by the Apostles. The word Presbyterian comes from the Greek term *presbuteros* meaning *elder* and refers to church government consisting of rule by a plurality of elders.

In the sixteenth century, there came a divine working of God in the reforming movement of the church. However, the Roman Catholic Church was not about to give up its administrative system of

centralized government. Nor was the Roman Church about to return to the Augustinian theology of the early church. As God continued to bless the preaching of His Word, there came into existence the establishment of what were called 'Reformed Churches.' One of the leading Pastors of the Reformation was the French theologian of Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin.

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France in 1509 and was a student of Latin, logic and philosophy at the University of Paris. Later he studied law and classical literature. About 1533, Calvin changed His theological views to those of the Reformation. After being involved in the French reformed movement, Calvin was forced to flee from Paris for His life. From 1534-1536 Calvin wrote the first edition of His Institutes of the Christian Religion. It was a systematic theology on the doctrinal teaching of the Reformation. God's providence led Calvin to Geneva where he ministered from 1536-1538, was exiled for three years and returned in 1541, where he remained a pastor until His death in 1564. It was here at Geneva, under the influence of John Calvin, that the Scottish Reformer, John Knox, advanced His understanding of systematic and ecclesiastical during a period of exile from Scotland.

Following imprisonment on a French galley, Knox had returned to northern England and had become the chaplain to King Edward VI. However, soon after King Edward's death, he was forced to flee to Europe to preserve his life. Upon His return to Scotland in 1559, Knox organized the Presbyterian Church as the official Church of Scotland. In 1560, John Knox led the Church of Scotland in developing a Confession and Covenants.

In the first 120 years following the start of the reformation in Germany, many other creeds were written by various ecumenical councils culminating in the Westminster Standards in the 1640's. This is one of the fullest and most thorough statements of the Christian faith ever penned. It was written in the years from 1643 to 1648 by a group of 121 ministers during some 1160 sessions spanning over 5½ years. It is comprised of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Directories for Public & Family Worship, the Sum of Saving Faith, the Form of Church Government and various other documents. The Church of Scotland was represented at this assembly by five of its leading theologians. There were no other significant creeds written for nearly 200 years. The Baptists (London) and Congregationalists (Savoy) essentially adopted the Westminster Confession with minor changes in the areas of baptism and church government. When people started immigrating to America, they brought their creeds with them.

In 1706 the First American Presbytery was formed in Philadelphia, and in 1716, it became the Synod of Philadelphia. In 1729, the Synod of Philadelphia adopted the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as its confession of faith with some minor changes regarding the power of the civil magistrate. In 1788, the Synod adopted the official name of their church as "The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America" and held its first meeting in 1789. While the details of history of the presbyterian church in the United States are instructive, the end result was that by the end of the Civil War, the church was formed of a northern body (Presbyterian Church in the United States of America) and a southern body (Presbyterian Church in the United States). The northern group fell into unbelief first resulting in the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1936. The southern group lasted another 36 years before a Bible believing remnant left the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) to form the Presbyterian Church in America, a continuing church. Attempts in the early 1980's for a reunion of the OPC and PCA were not successful. In 1983, a few churches in the North Georgia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America withdrew from the denomination over purity of doctrine and ecclesiastical practices. And eventually formed the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States as a continuing church. The next 21 years saw several changes in the name and composition of the church. In 2004 and 2005 the congregations that form the CPC joined this group as they moved toward a reformed understanding of scripture and presbyterian church government. However, within 12 months it became apparent that the practice of this body departed from their written documents in some significant ways. This led to

2 churches withdrawing together and joining with 2 other churches that were being asked to leave. Together these 4 churches formed the Covenant Presbyterian Church in the spring of 2006.

*For further reading:*

*Crossed Fingers, Gary North*

*Revival and Revivalism, Iain Murray*

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## THE DOCTRINAL STANDARDS AND OPERATION OF OUR CHURCH

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### WHAT ARE THE DOCTRINAL STANDARDS OF THE CPC?

It is the duty of the church to guard the Gospel of Christ by seeking to maintain the purity of the Word and doctrine. We are therefore compelled by the teaching of the Word and the conviction of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, to adopt a creedal theology which presents the fullest expression of the reformed faith. The Covenant Presbyterian Church subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as subordinate standards which represent the fullest expression of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We further acknowledge the wisdom and usefulness of the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Helvetic Confession, Gallican Confession and the Canons of Dordt as standards which express the same faith and practice of the Reformation Church.

### WHAT IS THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT OF THIS CHURCH?

1. The Bible,
2. The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (1647), and
3. The Form of Government of the CPC

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## LEAVING THE MEMBERSHIP OF OUR CHURCH

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A person's membership in this church can be terminated in one of three ways:

### BY PHYSICAL DEATH

When a member of the Church is removed from our midst by death, his/her name shall automatically be removed from the membership roll. In such instance, it would be our hope and expectation that we will again meet together in fellowship in the Father's House.

### BY TRANSFER

When it is so requested, the Session will grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of transfer to the fellowship of another church of like faith and practice. The Session may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church that is, in its judgment, unfaithful to the basic tenets of biblical Christianity.

Before transferring to a new church, a person should bathe the option in prayer. Obviously, a logical reason for a transfer would be relocation to another city. Another may be the marriage of a daughter into a family that attends a different church. But changes in church membership often result in the pain of separation and a sense of loss for the individuals leaving and for the congregation as a whole.

No church is perfect, but church membership is important to you and your family. If at some time in the future you decide to leave our fellowship to join a different church while staying in the same city, we would first encourage you to search your heart for the reasons. If they are based on a personal offense, our Session would ask you to understand your role in working through open issues so that roots of bitterness or unforgiveness do not impact your family. We exist to build a Christian community exemplified by brotherly love. If you desire to transfer to a church with a different doctrine, we would

ask you to meet with the Session to explain your position so we can offer doctrinal counsel and then assist you in finding a new church home.

#### **BY EXCOMMUNICATION**

According to the teaching of Scripture, a congregation must remove from its fellowship and visible membership one who insists on teaching or holding a heretical doctrine or who blatantly and persistently conducts oneself in a manner inconsistent with one's Christian profession (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1 ff). Excommunication is a last resort, to be used only after all other means of reclaiming the offending party have been exhausted. Its ultimate purpose is to promote the glory of God, to maintain the purity of Christ's church and to reclaim a wayward person. All church discipline shall be carried out in accordance with the Scriptures as applied in the Form of Government of the Covenant Presbyterian Church.

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## YOUR INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP TO OUR CHURCH

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If you have read this booklet, you should have a good idea what our church believes, our History, our purpose, our operation, and what is expected of members. We now extend to you an invitation to "join" the church. You do not have to agree with every detail of what we do and believe to be a member, but you should be in agreement with the major doctrine of the church and accept the fact that what we do is based on Scripture.

This process begins when you ask to meet with the Session of the church. Any person who trusts in the finished work of Christ for salvation, professes repentance toward God, has been baptized (or will be baptized upon joining), and is willing to submit to the government and discipline of this church is eligible for membership. We extend communicant membership (baptism and admission to the Lord's Table) to all who have a credible profession of faith. Non-communicant membership (baptism only) is extended to children of communicant members.

After completing this membership seminar and satisfying yourself that you are able and willing to take the vows of membership with a clear conscience, the next step toward pursuing membership is to speak with the Pastor about scheduling a meeting with the session in which you will be examined as to a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this meeting is for the elders to form a judgment regarding your profession. Do you have the necessary knowledge for salvation, are you trusting Christ's sacrifice for the atonement of your sins, and are you living consistent with your profession. The session will typically ask questions in the following areas:

1. Questions relating to the Gospel – what does it mean to be a Christian and how does a person become a Christian.
2. Questions related to your use of the means of grace. Is there regular faithful use of these means in your life and the life of your family, if you have one?
3. Questions related to your gifts and their exercise in the body of believers.
4. Questions related to areas the church can minister to you.

Following this meeting, a Lord's Day will be selected in which you will have an opportunity to publicly profess your faith in Christ by taking the following vows:

### MEMBERSHIP VOWS

1. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to be the perfect and only true way for a man to be saved?
2. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness, you abhor and humble yourself before God, and that you trust for salvation, not in yourself, but in the Lord Jesus Christ alone?
3. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise, in reliance on the grace of God, to serve Him with all that is in you, to forsake the world, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to lead a godly life?

4. Do you agree to submit in the Lord to the government of the Covenant Presbyterian Church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or practice, to heed its discipline?

If you believe that this is the place God wants you to fellowship, worship, and serve, then come join hands with us as we journey on this earthly pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem.

*“Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end Amen.  
(Ephesians 3:20, 21)*