

October – December 2005

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

“I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

(John 17:26)

In the Holy Scriptures, Almighty God acquainted people with His full **name** by degrees. *“God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I AM the Lord: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by My name Jehovah was I not known to them”* (Exodus 6:2-3). The saints of the Old Covenant days knew little of the doctrine of the Trinity. At that time, God primarily revealed Himself in the unity of His being, rather than as three distinct persons within the Godhead. This is not to say that the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not mentioned, or their coming predicted; but generally speaking, in the Old Testament, God is referred to as ‘The Almighty’, ‘The Creator’, ‘The Infinite’.

However, coming to the New Testament, further light is thrown upon the more obscure writings of the Old Covenant. Two verses alone will substantiate this: *“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort”* (2 Corinthians 1:3). Again: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3).

Here we learn of the Father and the Son; and that the man known as Jesus, who was a familiar figure in Nazareth, and often seen on the shores of Galilee and the surrounding countryside, was the Lord; the Christ, the Son of God, in fashion as a man. The infinite, Almighty God was the Father of this blessed person. He was no less than the Eternal Son; in human guise maybe, nevertheless,

Immanuel, God with men. What is more, in Him and through Him, believing sinners are blessed with all spiritual blessings. This indeed is a great advance in revelation. It is as if the great **name** of God Almighty is opening up like a bud coming into full bloom; His attributes and perfections being more fully declared. In the grace of the gospel, the power and wisdom of God is to be so manifest as to surpass even that which was displayed at creation. For **He** – the Christ, **is** “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:24). “*No man hath seen God at any time*” but “*the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him*” (John 1:18).

In these last days, the New Testament era, God hath spoken to us by His Son. He is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person (cf Hebrews 1:2-3). When upon earth, the incarnate Son of God clearly stated, “*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father*” (John 14:9), avowing with Divine authority “*I and My Father are one*” (John 10:30). It had been pronounced by Jehovah long before that “*My name is in Him*” (Exodus 23:21). The Old Testament prophet who foretold the coming into the world of the Son of God in a servant’s form, also spoke of the **names** by which He would be distinguished; among them were Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father (cf Isaiah 9:6). Truly, God’s name **was** in Him. The **names** of the Father and the Son are those of **One God**. None other than the Divine Mediator could make known the Mighty God; this He came to earth to do. Thus in the closing words of His communion with His Father He says: “*I have declared unto them Thy name and will declare it*”.

The four words “*and will declare it*” convey the thought of ongoing revelation. A similar sentiment was expressed to Nathaniel when Christ said to him “*Thou shalt see greater things than these*” (John 1:50). Ever and always in the spiritual understanding of the Christian, there are greater things ahead. University papers are not

set in primary schools; thus it is in the school of God. The Lord graciously allows for our human weakness and deals with us accordingly. Let none be discouraged by inability to retain truth. We have a teacher possessed of infinite patience, and He will take us along step by step and stage by stage, precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little, and there a little (cf Isaiah 28:10). “*I have declared, and will declare*” are His words to His Father. He is the author of our faith and He will be the finisher (cf Hebrews 12:2). He that hath begun the work in the believer will perform it (cf Philippians 1:6). This should be of great encouragement to us.

Probing yet deeper into this final verse of John seventeen, further truth concerning God’s **name** is elucidated. “*I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it; **that** the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be **in** them*”. The great end of God’s name being declared unto us in the gospel, is that His love might be in us. In the Holy Scriptures we learn of the love of God **toward** us and also of the love of God **within** us; though it is the same love, yet is there an unmistakeable difference which every Christian should fully understand.

As elect sinners we were loved of God in Christ from all eternity; that was the love of God’s decree; but at that period, not made actual to those concerned, for as yet they had no being. However in time, following creation, in their respective generations, that love is manifested to each upon whom it was declaratively set, as by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, each are brought through faith to salvation. It is at this point, namely, ‘regeneration’ that we know and believe the love that God has to us (cf 1 John 4:16). Although the elect were loved from a past eternity, they were not justified from a past eternity. They were preserved in Jesus Christ, as stated in Jude 1, but in a different condition before effectual calling than afterwards. Paul, writing to believers who **prior** to their conversion were notorious sinners, states, “*and such were some of you: but ye*

are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). The elect are children of wrath just as all others who have descended from the fallen federal head – Adam (cf Ephesians 2:2-3). *“There is no difference: for all have sinned”* (Romans 3:22-23).

Mortal man’s condition is to be assessed by God’s Law, under which **all** are condemned. What God’s sovereign thoughts and eternal purposes are to any individual, none know until His love is **in** them. It is perfectly true that God will never prosecute His rights of justice against a sinner who is elected unto salvation, but that sinner is not actually acquitted from the sentence of the Law until he genuinely repents and believes the gospel. No one receives a legal discharge from the condemnation of the Divine Law until they are legally ‘in Christ’: **then** it can be said *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1). No one can claim to be ‘in Christ’ until they publicly confess Him (cf Romans 10:9).

In the secret will of God, His love may be **toward** us, but we do not know this till His love is **in us**. For this reason Christ came into the world, to declare God in the gospel. *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him”* (1 John 4:9). All that is written and declared is to the end that sinners might believe. *“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”* (John 20:31). It is those who know His name that will put their trust in Him (cf Psalm 9:10).

God sent His Son into the world that He might be known in all the comprehensiveness of **His name** and the absolute balance of His attributes and holy perfections. He is the Almighty, Eternal, Thrice Holy One. He must also be declared as the God of infinite love,

abounding mercy and sovereign grace. Christ stressed these tenets on numerous occasions throughout His ministry, declaring that the Father had not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved (cf John 3:17). “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). Not only did Christ declare this glorious gospel of salvation, He also saw to it that there should be an ongoing army of preachers throughout all generations to continue the declaration. For how could men and women believe in a God of whom they had never heard? This God, in the fullness of His love ‘in Christ’ is heralded forth to this day. The wonder of the **name** of the God of all grace will continue to be preached until the day of His grace ends in the final judgment.

There is no spiritual hope outside of this declaration; “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other **name** under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). ‘**Saved**’! What volumes are encapsulated in this word: “*Saved from wrath through Him*” (Romans 5:9). “*Delivered from wrath to come*” (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

Keeping within the context of the verse under consideration; at regeneration “*The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost*” (Romans 5:5). **This** is the very thing for which our Lord prayed in His closing petition, “*That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them*”. In a true work of grace in salvation, this is what happens: the love of God pervades the soul because Christ has been received by faith. Consequently, the love of God which is in Christ, at that point enters the heart of the believing sinner in reality; and he, though once rebellious, loves God, realising that God first loved him (cf 1 John 4:19).

All this is headed up by the final three words “*I in them*”. God’s love cannot be in us unless Christ is in us; neither can Christ be in us apart from the Father’s love. When this is the case, it will be obvious to all by a changed life. “*If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him*” (John 14:23). This is high doctrine. It is not merely a relationship **between** us and Christ; we are **in** Him and He is **in** us. The analogy used in Scripture of ‘head and members’ is very apt, but it must not be confused with an organization such as a political ‘body’, where members of the party can shatter and dissipate, even bringing the body to nought, and its leader to disgrace. The Biblical figure with its spiritual meaning is a human body; Christ Himself being the Head, and each man, woman and young person of the election of grace, a member of that body. Such a body as this can never fragment or disintegrate, for the Holy Spirit baptizes every one **into** that body and the union is eternal. This is succinctly summarized in one of the Church Epistles: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). One God who is **in** us all – all His elect people. “**By eternal union one**”.

“Blest be the wisdom and the grace,
The eternal love and faithfulness,
That’s in the gospel scheme revealed,
And is by God the Spirit sealed.”

(J. Kent)

This article brings us to the end of the most wonderful prayer ever uttered upon this planet. May that which has been written be to His glory, and prove to be of help to all who read. **Amen**

W. H. Molland

“CHRISTIANITY WAS BORN FOR ENDURANCE”

There is some danger of falling into a soft and effeminate Christianity, under the plea of a lofty and ethereal theology. Christianity was born for endurance; not an exotic, but a hardy plant, braced by the keen wind; not languid, nor childish, nor cowardly. It walks with strong step and erect frame; it is kindly, but firm; it is gentle, but honest; it is calm, but not facile; obliging, but not imbecile; decided, but not churlish. It does not fear to speak the stern word of condemnation against error, nor to raise its voice against surrounding evils, under the pretext it is not of this world; it does not shrink from giving honest reproof, lest it come under the charge of displaying an unchristian spirit. It calls sin, sin, on whomsoever it is found, and would rather risk the accusation of being actuated by a bad spirit than not discharge an explicit duty.

Let us not misjudge strong words used in honest controversy. Out of the heat a viper may come forth; but we shake it off and feel no harm. The religion of both Old and New Testaments is marked by fervent outspoken testimonies against evil. To speak smooth things in such a case may be sentimentalism, but it is not Christianity. It is a betrayal of the cause of truth and righteousness. If anyone should be frank, manly, honest, cheerful (I do not say blunt or rude, for a Christian must be courteous and polite); it is he who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and is looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God. I know that charity covereth a multitude of sins; but it does not call evil good, because a good man has done it; it does not excuse inconsistencies, because the inconsistent brother has a high name and a fervent spirit; crookedness and worldliness are still crookedness and worldliness, though exhibited in one who seems to have reached an uncommon height of attainment.

Horatius Bonar (1808-89)

Seasons in the Soul

IV. Autumn

As the year advances, subtle changes begin to occur across the natural realm. The vibrant hues of summer give way to the deeper, richer shades of autumn; where once blossom appeared in abundance, there fruit now hangs in equal measure. This is the time traditionally associated with the annual ingathering of earth's bountiful harvest, the God-given "*fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*" (Acts 14:17).

Of all the seasons in the year, it is perhaps the harvest-time which has the clearest parallels with the Christian's soul. The Scriptures are filled with references to **fruit** and **fruitfulness** – not in a physical, but a spiritual sense. The Lord in His ministry likened the hearts of true believers to "*good ground*" in which, when the Word of God is sown, a full harvest grows up. In other places, the saint is described as being "*like a tree planted by rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season*" (Psalm 1:3), and as the branch of a flourishing vine (cf John 15:1-8).

Whether the analogy is wheat, figs or grapes, the truth is the same: the Christian is to bear fruit – to manifest good works (cf Colossians 1:10), moral virtues (cf Galatians 5:22-23) and spiritual graces (cf Philippians 1:11) as evidence of new birth, and a changed life (Matthew 7:15-20). This is indeed the whole purpose and destiny of God's elect people. Said Christ: "*I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain*" (John 15:16).

Modern agricultural methods have advanced to the point that crops are now harvested right through the year. Herein lies a lesson for the Christian. The development and production of spiritual fruit

must be an ongoing and continuous process; there is no time at which this Divine charge and obligation is lifted; there must be no barren periods engendered by a sinful attitude of tardiness, idleness or procrastination. How then is this perpetual harvest of “*fruit unto holiness*” (Romans 6:22) to be achieved? There are two essential components, which may be summarised as ‘human responsibility’ and ‘Divine sovereignty’.

Firstly, “*the fruit of righteousness is sown*” (James 3:18): here is the Christian’s duty. The farmer would be foolish to expect wheat to grow where he had not first planted seed. Similarly, a harvest of spiritual fruit requires at the outset a diligent work of sowing: “*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord*” (Hosea 10:12). The prophet here presents three aspects of the soul-sowing process: cultivation of personal and practical righteousness by obedience to the Word of God; mortification of the old nature, breaking down that which is hard or resistant to godliness; and earnest seeking after the Lord – by prayer, by searching the Scriptures, by attendance on the public means of grace.

This is no easy task, but demands the exercise of faith (cf Ecclesiastes 11:4), and the liberal expenditure of time and energies (cf 2 Corinthians 9:6). It also calls for persistence and perseverance: “*let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*” (Galatians 6:9). Yet with the challenges and difficulties which this work entails, there also comes a glorious promise: “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*” (Psalm 126:5-6). The hardships involved in the sowing of sanctification will at length give place to the joyous condition of fruitfulness.

The certainty of this promise is assured by the **second** component in spiritual fruit-bearing, namely the sovereignty of God. The life and growth of a plant from a tiny, dead-looking seed is one of the enduring wonders of nature. The development of the fruit of holiness in a saved sinner is no less a marvel. In both cases, it is “*God that giveth the increase*” (1 Corinthians 3:7); the animating power is imparted by His providential hand. He says: “*From Me is thy fruit found*” (Hosea 14:8). This fundamental truth in no way absolves Christians from responsibility, but should rather encourage them to pray for one another in the words of Paul “*Now He that ministereth seed to the sower both...multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness*” (2 Corinthians 9:10).

Whilst every stage in the life of a believer must be a time of fruitfulness, it is often the case that spiritual maturity increases with physical age. Here then is an application to saints of more advanced years. As the autumn-time of life approaches, it ought to be accompanied by a ripening in the things of God; increasing in the knowledge and emulation of Him. As the days of life are extended, it is but further opportunity for sowing to the Spirit, and reaping an abundance of spiritual fruit.

Every Christian should rightly desire a ‘**ripe** old age’. There are those who in later life are described as having ‘mellowed’ – an unenviable term meaning to grow soft, and sweet. They depart from the standard of faith which they once maintained, resign from responsibility, and retire from Christian service, seeking only comfort and ease. By contrast, to ‘ripen’ means to become mature and strong, fully developed, suitable or ready for use. This is the Biblical condition to which all God’s people must aspire. It is a delightful thing to find older Christians who, despite the restrictions of their age, are still “*abounding in the work of the Lord*”; those who in contemplation of the light of glory are being further ripened,

and made ready for that day when their Lord will gently pick them from the field, and gather them into His Heavenly garner.

In various places, Scripture likens the lives of all men to the brief existence of plants (cf 1 Peter 1:24). In Matthew's Gospel there is recorded a parable of the Lord, in which He describes the final judgment of the world as the great harvesting of humanity, at which time, examination will be made, and every soul's final destiny appointed. "*The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one...the harvest is the end of the world*" (Matthew 13:38).

Let every reader examine themselves as to how they will stand in that Last Day; when the world reaches its autumn season, and God issues the command "*Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come...for the harvest of the earth is ripe*" (Revelation 14:15). For those who appear before the Lord then, devoid of spiritual life and fruit, it will prove a great and terrible day. What could be more dreadful than to observe the calling in of all God's chosen people, and to find oneself excluded from that number, and have to confess: "*the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*" (Jeremiah 8:20)? For such as these, there remains only the prospect of eternal winter, and the perpetual night of the soul, "*outer darkness...weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 8:12).

But for those that have believed, and lived by faith, and proved themselves fruitful saints as long as life endured, that Great Day will represent the glorious 'harvest-home'. Isaiah describes the excitement which attended the completion of a natural harvest: "*they joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil*" (Isaiah 9:3) – but this will be nothing to compare with the joy which will attend the saints' reception into the glory of Heaven. If the angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth (cf Luke 15:10), how much greater will be

their exultation when they escort into the celestial realm the whole glorified company of God's elect people, all 'saved to sin no more'?

To truly comprehend that future blest estate defies all the power of words or imagination; but as the security of the granary surpasses the rigours of the open field, so the glory of the saints' final rest will far excel their condition here below. Then they will be forever freed from the buffeting winds of tribulation, the storms of doubt or fear, and the noonday heat of adversity. No longer will they have to contend with the thorns and briars of the ungodly all around, or the continual invasions of the Evil One. They will be gathered up from the earth in which they long have dwelt, and 'enter into the joy of their Lord' (cf Matthew 25:21), being received at last into the eternal shelter of Heaven. Their life's work of fruitfulness will be complete; a gloriously accomplished reality, accepted and treasured by Almighty God, and had in everlasting remembrance.

What a wondrous prospect the heavenly storehouse of God presents! What will it be to be there? May the contemplation of its glories put our sojourning here below into true perspective, and when the autumn-tide of our life at length arrives, may He in mercy carry us safely there.

“We bear the burden of the day,
And often toil seems dreary;
But labour ends with sunset ray,
And rest comes for the weary:
May we, the angel-reaping o'er,
Stand at the last accepted,
Christ's golden sheaves for evermore
To garner bright elected.”

R. J. Steward

“God’s Everlasting Covenant”

II. SAMUEL 23:5

This was one of David’s testimonies on earth. This covenant was **Divine in its origin**, “*He hath made with me an everlasting covenant*”. Oh! that great word, “**He**”. Stop, my soul; God, the everlasting Father, has positively made a covenant with thee; yea, that God who spake the world into existence by a word: He, stooping from His majesty, takes hold of my hand and makes a covenant with me. Is it not a deed, the stupendous condescension of which might ravish our hearts for ever if we could really understand it? “**He hath made with me a covenant**”. The Prince of the kings of the earth – Shaddai, the Lord all-sufficient, the Jehovah of ages, the everlasting Elohim – “*He hath made with me an everlasting covenant*”. But, notice, it is **particular in its application** – “*yet hath He made with **me** an everlasting covenant*”. Here lies the sweetness to each believer. It is nought for me that He made peace for the world; I want to know whether He made peace for **me**! It is little that He hath made a covenant; I want to know that He hath made a covenant **with me**! If God the Holy Ghost gives me assurance of this, then His salvation is mine, His heart is mine, He Himself is mine – **He is my God**.

This covenant is **everlasting in its duration**. An everlasting covenant means a covenant which had no beginning, and which shall never, never end. How sweet amidst all the uncertainties of life to know that “*the foundation of the Lord standeth sure*”, and to have God’s own promise, “*My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My mouth*”.

Like dying David, “*I will sing of this, even though my house be not so with God as my heart desireth*”.

C. H. Spurgeon

CHURCH COVENANTS

What is a church covenant?

A Christian's relationship to God is set forth in the New Testament in terms of covenant. Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant and He dispenses the blessings of the Covenant to His people, sealed in His blood (cf Hebrews 8:6-13).

Church membership is also a covenantal relationship. Like David and Jonathan who made a covenant with one another (cf 1 Samuel 18:3), fellow members of a local church covenant together to live Christ-honouring lives in obedience to Scripture. For this reason Baptist churches historically have seen the wisdom of church covenants, as well as confessions of faith.

Church covenants, like confessions of faith, are sensible and practical. A confession of faith summarizes what a church believes the Bible teaches on main theological points. A church covenant summarizes the teachings of Scripture concerning the duties of the members to Christ, the Head of the Church, and to one another as fellow members of the body of Christ (cf 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Church confessions are concerned with doctrine while church covenants are concerned with practice. Together they help maintain order and purity in the local church.

Churches that do not subscribe to written confessions of faith and church covenants generally claim that the doctrine of the Bible is their confession and that the commandments of the Bible are their covenant. That is well and good but every sermon preached, and every commitment made constitutes in reality a confession of faith and a church covenant. It is in the interest of clarification and openness that churches have a written confession of faith and church covenant. They tell everyone the belief and practice of the church. Confessions of faith and church covenants need adjustment

and revision from time to time, for they are not infallible, but they are of great theological and practical value.

A church covenant is a document that should be consistent with the written Word of God. It should set forth expectations and obligations of individual members within a gathered church. A church covenant reflects the seriousness of being part of a local assembly of believers. When people join a church and enter into a covenant, they make a solemn pledge to the Lord Jesus Christ and to one another to live the faith they profess to possess.

Baptist churches first employed church covenants when they began writing confessions of faith, though not all Baptist churches agreed with the use of church covenants. But the two naturally go together. The confession gives the doctrinal affirmation of what the church believes. The covenant gives the practical guidelines of how the members are to conduct their lives.

Reasons for having a church covenant

There are two good reasons why every assembly of believers should have a Church Covenant.

First, a church covenant defines the obligations of membership and requires the commitment of the believer who unites with the church to conduct himself according to the standard set forth by the Word of God as summarized in the covenant.

Benjamin Keach, whose church adopted a ‘Solemn Covenant’ at the same time as they subscribed to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, said that before a person is admitted as a member of a church “*they must solemnly enter into a Covenant*”. That covenant, he went on to say, requires one “... *to walk in the Fellowship of that particular Congregation, and submit themselves to the Care and Discipline thereof, and to walk faithfully with God*

in all His Holy Ordinances, and there to be fed and have Communion, and worship God there, when the Church meets (if possible) and give themselves up to the watch and charge of the Pastor and Ministry thereof..." ('The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline Displayed', 1697).

A church covenant uses language like, 'we agree', 'we resolve', or 'we promise'. Then the items of mutual agreement, to which the members bind themselves, are set forth. A paragraph from the church covenant of my boyhood said, "*We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness and comfort*". This covenant was included in our denominational hymnbook and many churches had large prints of it framed and hanging inside their church buildings.

Second, accountability is the happy result of a church covenant. Members should be reminded occasionally of the covenant they made when they came into the fellowship of the church and challenged to keep their promise. In that way, they are held accountable unto God and to the church. Violators of the covenant agreement should be admonished and disciplined when necessary.

When members are held accountable, it helps prevent their drifting away into doctrinal or moral error. Accountability is a good thing, something everyone needs, and it is preserved when believers are reminded of their covenant commitments.

Practical suggestions

It is a good idea to read the church covenant when applicants for church membership join the church. In the past, some Baptist churches in America, only observing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper quarterly, read the church covenant each time they assembled for communion and called for reaffirmation.

The church covenant of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC, is read at the annual business meeting each year and members are called to recommit themselves to it. Mark Dever, the pastor of the church says: ‘By featuring the covenant in our life together, we strive to protect ourselves from individual and corporate sin. Of equal importance, we spur one another on to live in light of a greater covenant, one initiated by love, sealed by sacrifice, and kept for eternity by our Saviour, Jesus Christ’.

A church covenant highlights the serious nature of church membership and the covenant commitment to Christ and one another. Surely, in this day of apathy and indifference in church life, the need for greater faithfulness on the part of God’s people is critical. Marriages are stronger when husbands and wives remember to practise their marriage vows. So also are churches that are serious about their covenant commitments.

Dean Olive (Grace Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., USA)
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Covenant commitment is...involved. By this is meant that members of the church voluntarily bind themselves together to form a church, mutually agreeing to carry out all that is agreed upon as members of that church. Many Independent churches of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had covenants committed to writing and subscribed by their members. For scripture warrant they would point to the covenant theology of the Bible in general, and to 2 Corinthians 8:5 in particular: “*They...first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God*”... K. W. H. Howard wrote: “It is not putting matters too strongly to say that the covenant idea was the root principle of their church order; and from it, with due appeal to scripture, flowed the related principles of membership and discipline”.

Excerpt from “*The Keys of the Kingdom*”
Poh Boon Sing

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL: A *CHURCH COVENANT*

(Reproduced below is the full text of the Covenant upheld in the Church which meets at North Road Chapel. These words are recited before the gathered congregation at the annual Church business meeting, and when believers joining themselves to the Church are admitted into membership).

“In the name of our Lord Jesus, and in obedience to His revealed will, we covenant together to give ourselves solemnly and prayerfully to the Lord and to one another, relying entirely upon the grace of God, the precious blood and righteousness of our Lord and Saviour, the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the infallible Word of God.

We resolve to walk together in holiness of life, taking the Holy Scriptures as our sole rule in faith, worship and practice, promising to uphold doctrine and to obey the laws of God’s house, binding ourselves to love one another, and to seek each other’s good, always striving for peace. We determine to hold fast the faithful Word, to declare all the counsel of God and to stand firm in the Faith.

We call heaven and earth to witness this our solemn covenant with God and with each other, and fervently pray that God will grant us His blessing as we unite as a Christian Church under our Great Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Amen.

Mrs Mary Round, a dear sister and faithful member at North Road, passed away on Lord’s Day 14th August 2005, aged 95 years. Until poor health began to prevent her, she had been in regular attendance since joining the Church in 1975. The funeral was conducted at the Chapel on Thursday 18th August 2005. We rejoice that she is now “...with Christ; which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

Editorial

In a life which is so uncertain, in a world continually subject to change, it is a tremendous encouragement to the saints to know that their spiritual destiny is steadfast and unmoveable. The Christian faith, and the Divine blessing into which every child of God is brought, are irrefutable and secure. “*The foundation of God standeth sure*” (2 Timothy 2:19), for underpinning the great work of redemption is “*an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for **this** is all my salvation*” (2 Samuel 23:5). Electing love in the past, new birth in the present, preservation and glorification in the future are all subject to this timeless transaction.

What is a **covenant**? In general terms, it is a binding agreement or contract, entered into by two parties. A promise or oath is affirmed, with conditions for fulfilment, and consequences for infidelity. Even in the present day, ‘covenant giving’ is commonplace, where a person makes a contractual arrangement to pay an annual contribution to a charity. The pages of Holy Writ reveal that Almighty God Himself is the great respecter of covenants, and uses this principle in His dealings with mankind. The very titles by which the divisions of Scripture are known demonstrate this fact: the Old and New Covenants, or Testaments – the words are synonymous.

In a past era, God covenanted with the children of Israel (cf Deuteronomy 29); with Abraham, their natural father (cf Genesis 15), and with David, their most famous king (cf 2 Samuel 23:1-7). Yet these old covenants simply serve as an “*example and shadow of heavenly things*”, and illustrate, though imperfectly, the **new covenant** into which every true believer is brought. This is a “*better covenant...established upon better promises*” (Hebrews 8:6), which has at its centre, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is its

Mediator, reconciling God and man (cf Hebrews 8:6); He is its Surety, paying the price of His people's perfidy, and supplying the righteousness demanded of them (cf Hebrews 7:22); by His death, the blessings pledged in this covenant are bequeathed, that "*they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*" (Hebrews 9:15). Such is the wonderful way in which God deals with the saints – legally binding Himself to accomplish their salvation.

It is written in 1 John 4:11: "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*" – the manner in which God has loved His people should be reflected in the way in which they love one another. Just as a covenantal relationship exists between God and His Church, Church members should themselves be in covenant together. "*Can two walk together except they be agreed*" (Amos 3:3)? If a local body of believers is to walk worthy of their calling, there must be agreement, commitment and confederacy between them; an oath of allegiance to that Holy Nation of which they are made a part.

In the present day there is a generally low regard for Church membership amongst Christians. For some it is an 'optional extra' to their faith; for others merely a social exercise. The truth of Scripture stands in opposition to such an impoverished mindset. Being united to a company of the Lord's saints is the highest privilege and responsibility an individual can have upon earth. Here alone can be experienced the 'fellowship of kindred minds', and the brotherly love which scripture commands. Here only may one engage in corporate prayer and congregational worship "*In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee*" (Hebrews 2:12). Only within the context of the local church may a believer enjoy the "*communion of the body of Christ*" (cf 1 Corinthians 10:16), when a community of likeminded Christians gather around their Lord's Table.

God has appointed two ordinances that set forth the love which He has for His people: one is the marriage bond; the other is the fraternity of the Church. Both are founded upon love; both involve separate individuals coming together to form ‘one body’; both unions must be jealously guarded; both should commence with solemn covenants toward God and one another. The institution of a Church Covenant serves not only to protect and preserve local congregations – it also provides a timely reminder of the seriousness of membership, and brings glory to God.

It is sad to say that despite such measures, there continues to be a great flux of professed Christians out of the Churches to which they once belonged. To break any covenant which has invoked God’s name is a grave sin. Every covenant that is pledged before the Lord is **appropriated** by Him (He calls it “*My covenant*”), **approved** by Him, and will be **avenged** by Him: “*My covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head*” (Ezekiel 17:19). Those who can so readily go back on their word, and go out from their Churches, display an ignorance of God’s justice and a disregard for the whole principle of covenants upon which their salvation is founded.

Since “*He will ever be mindful of His covenant*” (Psalm 111:5), then “*Be ye mindful always of His covenant; the word which He commanded to a thousand generations*” (1 Chronicles 16:15).

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