

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

March 3, 2020

On Sunday we considered the **New Covenant** prophesied by Jeremiah and inaugurated by Jesus on the night He was betrayed.¹ Some of you will know that our congregation—like many Baptist congregations—has a “Church Covenant.” For others, this is new information 😊.



The governing documents of our congregation—again, like most Baptist churches—are three: (1) the Bible; (2) the Church Constitution; and (3) the Church By-Laws. The Constitution is over-arching and fairly general, while the By-Laws are quite specific and are in some ways more useful for day-to-day life together. At the same time, what the Constitution affirms is quite important, and the largest part of our Constitution is our mutual Covenant.

I have attached herewith both our CBF Constitution and our Covenant formatted as a separate document. I encourage all CBFers to read these documents carefully, whether as a refresher or as a first-time read. And I have been unable to resist offering a bit of commentary on the first section of the Covenant, which you will find below. (I was able to finally bring myself to stop after the first section.)

Commentary on the first section of the CBF Church Covenant

We covenant with God, our Father:

1. We accept, O Lord, Your forgiveness for the sins we have committed, and pray that You will stop their harmful effects; we covenant with You to be forgiving persons.

The covenant begins where it must begin, in our acceptance of our situation before God as sinners worthy of judgment as well as our acceptance of God's provision of forgiveness—*once for all*—through Jesus' sacrifice of the New Covenant. That acceptance causes us to be “*born again*”—Jesus' words (John 3:3)—and to become new creations in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). Apart from this transformation, we are unable to enter into the New Covenant with God, much less to actually keep up our part of it.

This first statement recognizes that our sin causes harm far beyond our awareness of it and continues to do so long after we have repented from it. And it reminds us that God's forgiveness of our own sin is conditioned upon our willingness to forgive others “*who trespass against us*” (Matthew 6:12-15).

2. We thank You, O Lord, for touching our hearts and lives with Your healing; we covenant with You to be healers of others.

The second statement expresses thanks to God for our own healing, and covenants with God to pass that healing on to others in any way we can. Paul told us that “*God comforts us in*

¹ That sermon is available here:

www.dcstancil.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Guarantees.60160310.pdf

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all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4). "Freely you have received," Jesus said; "freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

3. We thank You, our Father, for making us aware of Your Presence; we covenant with You to watch for, wait upon, and depend on Your help in our daily lives.

The third statement recognizes with gratitude that we would not know God at all had God not chosen to reveal Himself to us in ways that we could perceive and understand. This statement grows out of Jesus' teaching in the Upper Room: "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

4. We thank You, O Lord, for accepting us as persons, when we are so far from being holy and righteous; we covenant with You, to be persons who accept others, even when they do not measure up to our standards.

Statement four expresses gratitude for the fact that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). It affirms the principles Paul gave us in Colossians: "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (3:12-14; see also the principles in Romans 14).

5. We thank You, O Lord, for being interested in our lives; we covenant with You to let Your Son Jesus be our Lord.



The fifth principle celebrates God's concern for us as both Father (Psalm 103:13; Matthew 6:9) and Shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10:1-18). Our reciprocal covenant responsibility is to "let Jesus be our Lord," which means that we commit ourselves to obeying everything He has commanded us to do, chief among which is to love each other (Luke 6:46; John 14:15; Matthew 28:20). Such obedience is not to be taken lightly. Jesus has the right to command (Matthew 7:21).

6. We recognize, O Lord, the steadfastness of Your faithfulness to us; we return that commitment and dedicate our lives to You and Your service.

The sixth principle again joins the psalmist in affirming that "Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies" (Psalm 36:5). Our pledged response includes at least these four things:

- "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

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- “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).
- “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).
- “Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [other] things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

7. We thank You, O Lord, for breaking some of the sinful bonds on our lives; we covenant with You to be Christian toward those who are not experiencing this freedom.

Although Jesus has already achieved final and complete victory over the powers of evil, the seventh statement acknowledges that we ourselves have not. We have more familiarity than we wish we did with Paul’s lament in Romans 7 that “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (7:15, 18).

The seventh statement also reminds us of Paul’s warning in Galatians 6: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (6:1-2).

8. We thank You, O Lord, for loving us when we do not deserve Your love; we covenant with You to love one another as You have loved us.

The final statement of the first section of our Church Covenant acknowledges once more with wonder and amazement how much God loves us, having chosen us in Christ “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:4). As John exulted, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

And our response to God’s love is to pass it on to others: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. . . . This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. . . . We love because God loved us first” (1 John 4:7, 10-11, 19).

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Yes, we are a Covenant People, blessed beyond all measure. And we thank God!

Dave



# **Constitution of the Columbia Baptist Fellowship**

## **PREAMBLE**

For the more certain preservation of the principles of our faith, and to the end that this body may be governed in an orderly manner consistent with the accepted tenets of the Baptist World Alliance, and for the purpose of preserving the liberties inherent in each individual member of this church and the freedom of action of this body with respect to its relation to other churches of the same faith, we do declare and establish this Constitution.

## **I. NAME**

This church shall be known as the Columbia Baptist Fellowship.

## **II. COVENANT**

### We covenant with God, the Father:

We accept, O Lord, Your forgiveness for the sins we have committed, and pray that You will stop their harmful effects; we covenant with You to be forgiving persons.

We thank You, O Lord, for touching our hearts and lives with Your healing; we covenant with You to be healers of others.

We thank You, our Father, for making us aware of Your Presence; we covenant with You to watch for, wait upon, and depend on Your help in our daily lives.

We thank You, O Lord, for accepting us as persons, when we are so far from being holy and righteous; we covenant with You, to be persons who accept others, even when they do not measure up to our standards.

We thank You, O Lord, for being interested in our lives; we covenant with You to let Your Son Jesus be our Lord.

We recognize, O Lord, the steadfastness of Your faithfulness to us; we return that commitment and dedicate our lives to You and Your service.

We thank You, O Lord, for breaking some of the sinful bonds on our lives; we covenant with You to be Christian toward those who are not experiencing this freedom.

We thank You, O Lord, for loving us when we do not deserve Your love; we covenant with You to love one another as You have loved us.

### We covenant with one another:

Because God has accepted me, I accept you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, into my life and into my care. I covenant to accept you as you are and hope that we can grow together to be mature children of God.

Because I have experienced the forgiveness of God in my life, I covenant with you as a brother or sister in Christ to forgive you, even when I feel the pain you may cause me.

Because I know God's help and support in my life, I covenant, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to support you to the best of my abilities, in times of your grief, stress and sickness.

Because we are members of Christ's Body, the Church, I covenant with you to share life and service with you, with all of its joys and sorrows. I covenant to be concerned about you and your family. I promise to defend you as brothers and sisters in Christ from those who would deny you their love and respect. I covenant to be honest with you, even when it may be painful to us both.

I covenant to respond when you try to help me. I promise to trust that you act from a concern for me.

I covenant with you that henceforth I will commit my life to be your friend in Jesus Christ, the One who has touched us all and given our lives meaning.

We covenant together:

To apply our faith in all aspects of our lives;

To strive for a more perfect society in keeping with the Spirit of God;

To be faithful stewards of our time, influence, abilities, and possessions;  
to use them wisely and fully;

To assemble ourselves together regularly for worship, study, witness, and fellowship;

To pray for one another and care for one another;

To encounter God daily through reading the Scriptures and prayer; and to be faithful to this fellowship of Christians.

**III. POLITY**

The government of this church is vested in the body of believers who compose it. It is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body, but it recognizes and sustains the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation which are common among Baptist churches.

**IV. DOCTRINE**

This church receives the Scriptures as its authority in matters of faith and practice. Its members believe their understanding of Christian truth as contained therein to be in accord with the basic beliefs of the members of churches cooperating through the Baptist World Alliance.

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