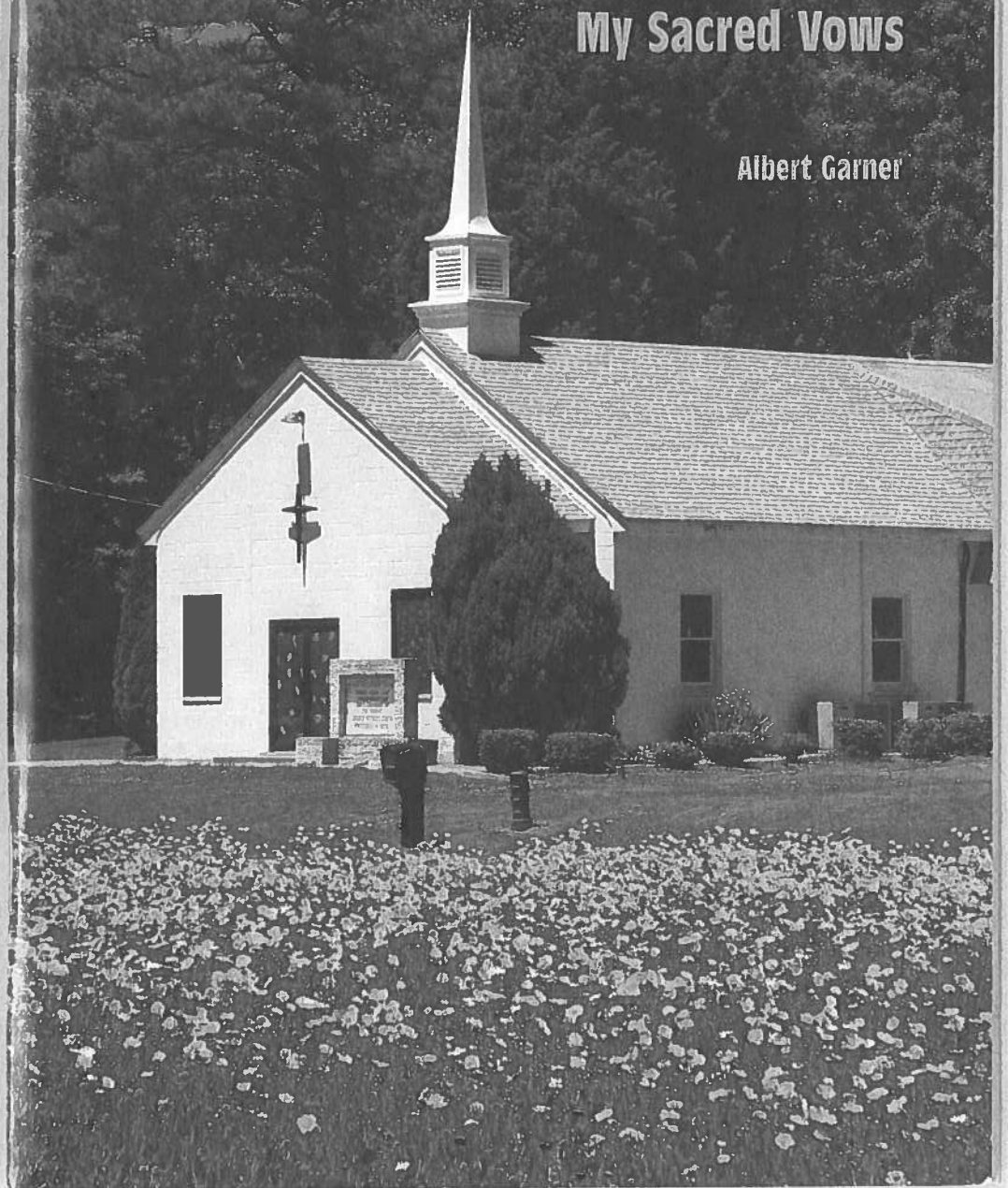


The Church Covenant

My Sacred Vows

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CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

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

I

Entering Into Church Covenant

This is the first in a series of thirteen lessons on the Church Covenant. The term "church" is used with reference to "a company of baptized believers in Christ, associating together to carry out His commands." The term "covenant" is used to mean an "agreement" between or among two or more individuals.

The Church Covenant, Paragraph 1, on which this lesson is based, reads:

"Having been led as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ."

This lesson is outlined as follows: (1) The Way of Salvation, (2) The Way of Confession, (3) The Way of Baptism, and (4) The Way of Church Organization.

I. The Way of Salvation

The way one is saved or becomes a child of God is expressed in the first sentence of the church covenant: "Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour."

First, this indicates that Baptists believe God takes the initiative in bringing about the salvation of every man. And it is true that no one can come to Jesus, except the Father draw him, John 6:44. God's Holy Spirit leads (inclines or disposes) a sinner to come to the Lord in repentance and receive Jesus Christ as His Saviour. This disposition of the mind, inwrought by the Holy Spirit's conviction, leads one to repentance and is the goodness of God that is not to be "despised or taken lightly," Rom. 2:4; II Cor. 7:10; John 16:7-9.

Second, this teaches that salvation is a voluntary matter, contingent on each person's receiving Jesus Christ for himself. Salvation comes though one's receiving **a person**. That person is Jesus Christ, not baptism, not reformation, not church membership. Men must receive Him, John 1:12, 13. Men must come to Him, believe in Him, or be forever lost, without help or hope, John 8:24; 5:40.

II. The Way of Confession

This church covenant is entered into "on the profession of our faith." The Scriptures teach that when men believe in Jesus Christ from their hearts they should enter immediately upon a life-long pilgrimage of confessing Him. Rom. 10:10, 11 reads, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Rom. 5:5 further reads, "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Salvation and a public confession that one has been saved should always precede baptism. This salvation occurs when one receives Jesus as his personal Saviour, by grace through faith, Eph. 2:8, 9; Gal. 3:26. This salvation occurs when one takes the Water of Life freely, Rev. 22:17. Then "what is one to confess?" it may be asked. If he has already been saved before confession and before baptism, why should he confess and why should he be baptized? (1) **First**, he should confess that he has repented of his sins and received Jesus Christ as his Saviour, because the Lord commands believers to confess him without shame, Mark 8:34, 38. A personal, public confession of faith is required of the Lord from every man before he is a fit subject for baptism. (2) **Second**, one should confess or testify that he is saved before he is baptized because such was the practice of New Testament believers. Philip required this of the eunuch, Acts 8:37. Peter required this of the household of Cornelius, Acts 10:44-48. Paul and Silas preached salvation by faith in Christ, before baptism, to the Philippian jailer.

One is to confess Jesus Christ by being a "doer of the word and not a hearer only," James 1:22. The hypocrite offers lip-confession, but the Christian is to offer helping-hand service, Mark 7:5-9; this is to be done not with eye-service as men pleasers, Eph. 6:6-8. It is accepted, if done willingly, no matter how small the gift or deed, II Cor. 8:12. If on profession of our faith we enter into church covenant, church membership and church privileges, is it not plausible that we should continue to confess Jesus Christ in doing those things to which we commit ourselves? Indeed, our Lord has said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," John 15:14.

III. The Way of Baptism

The way of Scriptural Baptism is that a saved person who has publicly confessed Jesus Christ as his Saviour must be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This is in keeping with the examples of New Testament Baptism and the command of our Lord, John 4:2; Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 2:41.

"But what does it mean to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?" one may ask. The answer is that it means to be "baptized by the **authority** of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." The Father first authorized the institution of baptism, John 1:33. The Son required that it be administered to Him, and the Holy Spirit sanctioned our Lord's baptism at the hand of John the Baptist, Matt. 3:13-15.

When one baptizes in the name of Jesus (by the authority of Jesus) he must baptize as Jesus instructed His church to do before He went away. His words were "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptists dare not baptize any other way.

Baptism is not only to be administered to a saved person who has confessed that Jesus Christ is his Saviour but it must also be administered by the **proper authority and in the proper manner**. The proper authority (the only authority) for administering baptism scripturally is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, for it was to her, not the preachers

He gave the commission, Matt. 28:16-20. The proper manner of baptism requires that the believer in Christ must be buried or planted in water and raised again to testify to the world concerning his hope in Christ. Every act of New Testament baptism was by a burial of the candidate beneath the water and a raising of him from the water again, fittingly identifying him as a follower of Jesus Christ, Matt. 3:15, 16; Acts 8:37, 38; Rom. 6:4, 5; Col. 2:12.

Nothing short of a burial in water and a resurrection from the water is a fitting picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sprinkling and pouring are acts of religious desecration and blasphemy against the Bible Story that Jesus was "sealed in Joseph's new tomb," from which He came forth in the resurrection. If you were not "sealed," (buried), in the watery grave of baptism, then your baptism did not honestly picture the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Any baptism that is not a burial in water and beneath the water is a plain mockery of the Bible Account of the burial and resurrection of our Lord. Weigh this well, dear friend.

IV. The Way of Church Organization

A New Testament church has been defined by this writer as, "A company of baptized believers in Christ companying together to carry out His commands." The New Testament church was simple in its organization. It seems to have begun when Jesus, "walking by the sea of Galilee saw two men, Simon Peter and Andrew his brother casting their nets into the sea and said, Come ye after me and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him," Matt. chapter 4.

Peter had formerly been saved and baptized at the hands of John the Baptist, for it was required that one must have companied from John's baptism in order to be qualified for the apostleship, Acts 1:20, 21. In the light of the Scriptures it seems that when two or more baptized believers in Jesus Christ begin "to company together," in covenant relationship, to carry out the Lord's commands they may constitute

a true New Testament church. The simplest form of a New Testament church or how one may be formed is presented in Matt. 18:20 which reads, "For where two or three are gathered together **in my name** (by my authority, A. G.), there am I in the midst of them."

Just as it is necessary for two or more baptized believers in Christ to enter into covenant with one another to constitute "one body," congregation in Christ, even so it is needful that every member who is later voted into her fellowship, contingent on baptism, shall also consider himself as an agreeing member to help achieve the announced objectives of our Lord and His church. There is but "one body" (church body). This means but one **IN KIND**. It is composed of saved, Scripturally baptized, and Scripturally covenanted doers of the Word of Jesus Christ, Eph. 4:4, 5. It is believed that after the persecution at Jerusalem and in Samaria wherever Christians went they covenanted together in local bands, bodies, churches to carry out our Lord's commands, thus began new churches which were often found on Paul's arrival on foreign fields.

THE SUMMARY: Having examined The Way of Salvation, Confession, Baptism, and Church Organization, it is hoped now that we may learn more how to serve our Lord through our church and carrying out the pledges we made to her when we became members.

QUESTIONS

1. Who takes the lead in bringing a sinner to salvation?
2. On what is every man's salvation contingent?
3. What should precede everyone's baptism?
4. Give two reasons one should make a public confession before baptism.
5. What must men do to be friends to Jesus?
6. What does it mean to be baptized in the name of the Trinity?
7. What is the proper authority for administering baptism?
8. What is required to meet the Bible examples of baptism?
9. Describe the simplest form of a New Testament church organization.
10. What is meant by the Scripture, "there is one body"?

II

Striving For Church Advancement

This is the second in a series of thirteen lessons on the Church Covenant. It has been stated that a church covenant is an agreement between two or more persons who have linked themselves together as baptized believers in Christ, pledging to carry out in company relations and effort, the "all things" commanded of our Lord in the Great Commission. The Bible is the Word of God, the perfect rule and guide for our faith in practice. In **addition to it**, Missionary Baptists have no rule and guide. In expressing what we understand it to teach, however, Baptists have through the centuries written out what they understood the Bible to teach concerning certain principles and practices. Hence **Declarations of Faith, Articles of Agreement**, and the **Church Covenant** have been adopted as summary expressions of what we believe the Bible to teach concerning doctrinal positions and practical ways of expressing them in preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Church Covenant is a promise **to do** certain things, while our Declarations of Faith are statements that **we believe** certain things. This lesson develops paragraph 2 of the Church Covenant:

"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."

The lesson is given under five parts:

I. Our Pledge

The oft used phrase, "We engage," means **WE PLEDGE**. A pledge is a vow, promise, or agreement. In Divine matters it is a solemn thing. This pledge or vow is made by invoking "the aid of the Holy Spirit." It is the work of the Holy Spirit to magnify Christ in the church through our deeds of service, through His church, John 15:26; 16:12-14.

Paul admonished, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with (governed or controlled by) the Spirit," Eph. 5:18. To this one pledges himself upon becoming a member of our Lord's church. Eph. 6:17-18 further exhorts one to faithful perseverance of prayer and service to God through the church.

II. In Christian Love

The Church Covenant commits one to "walk together in Christian love," with other members of the church. This is the very spirit of our Lord's words when He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," John 13:34, 35. Of this Rom. 12:10 reads, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." This daily manifestation of brotherly love is a means of demonstrating to the world that one knows Jesus. This is the very fulfillment of the law of Christ to love one's neighbor as himself. Of this Rom. 13:10 reads, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." We should "walk together in Christian love."

III. In Knowledge

Our pledge is "to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge." Let each ask himself, Do I strive hard to advance my church in knowledge? Do I strive to advance myself in knowledge of the Word of the Lord? The term "strive" means to work hard, to labor strenuously and earnestly. Do we work hard and labour earnestly and strenuously to learn more and more about the Word of God?

Church members should seek, strive, or work hard to increase in the knowledge of the Lord, II Peter 3:18. When one grows in "grace and knowledge" of the Lord he can serve Him better. The Berean Church was commended, complimented because her people "searched the Scriptures daily," Acts 17:11. Paul commended the Ephesian brethren to a study of the Word of His Grace that would "build them up," Acts 20:31.

Zeal without a measure of knowledge will cause many errors. Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest, because of a lack of knowledge of the will of God. Paul told of members of his race who had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, Rom. 10:1, 2; he further admonished Timothy to "study" in order that he might not be ashamed but rightly divide the Word of truth, so as to be approved of God, II Tim. 2:15. In addition to winning people to Christ and salvation; in addition to baptizing such as have been saved, our Lord's church is to "teach the all things whatsoever He has commanded," that men may increase in knowledge to the edifying of the body of Christ.

IV. In Holiness

Every member of one of the Lord's churches vows to strive or work hard for the advancement of his church not only in knowledge but also in holiness. The term holiness means to "be set apart from the profane to the sacred." A church can advance in sacred things only to the extent that her members advance or grow in sacred things. The Scriptures admonish men to live separated and holy lives unto the Lord.

I Peter 1:15, 16 reads, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Eph. 1:4b declares that we should be, "holy and without blame before him in love." What we **should do** he grants us grace and means **to do, if** we are willing to do it. The life of holiness is a life of separation from the lusts of the flesh to the things of the Spirit in thought, word, and deed.

Paul admonished the Roman brethren, "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness," Rom. 6:19b. He further wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, **holy**, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," Rom. 12:1. God does not ask the impossible or even the unreasonable when He asks that we fulfill our vows to grow in holiness and help our church to advance in holiness.

V. In Comfort

The Church Covenant commits one to strive for the advancement of his church in "comfort." The term comfort means to console, to call along side of, to share affections with the weak or sick. Our Lord was a personal comforter to His associates when they were in any need on earth. When He went away He promised to send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He did send Him. He is with us and in us until today. Yet, we are to be personal comfort-sharers with those who are in any trouble.

II Cor. 1:3, 4 reads, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of **all comfort**; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, **THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO COMFORT THEM WHICH ARE IN ANY TROUBLE**, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Read Rom. 15:1-4; I Thess. 4:18; 5:11; II Thess. 2:16, 17.

QUESTIONS

1. Tell the difference between the Church Covenant and Declarations of Faith.
2. What does the phrase, "we engage," mean?
3. What does brotherly love manifest to the world?
4. What does the term "strive" mean, as used in the Church Covenant?
5. Why should church members increase in knowledge of the Lord?
6. What does the term "holiness" mean?
7. Explain the meaning of the word, "comfort."
8. Why does God comfort us in our troubles?