

Carry Out the Spirit of This Covenant

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. (The First Baptist Church of Waterville's Covenant)

The remarkable thing about American Baptist local church covenants is that they are owned by the congregation but enforced by the individual making the covenant. In other words, we need to take the vows we make seriously and through self-reflection, honor the covenant we make by attempting to put into practice our words with acts and attitudes that embody the meaning of our words. It is not up to the body of believers to hold me accountable for my covenant fulfillment, it is up to me. It is always easy to compare myself to another and point out their shortcomings. You don't have to look far to see another's failures. It is another thing to look at one's own actions and hold oneself accountable for their actions and attitudes.

Some have argued that we have the responsibility to hold others accountable for their actions and attitudes. Covenants seem to be a useful tool for this endeavor. However, to use covenant in such a manner is to misuse the nature of the covenant itself. Covenants are made under the authority of Jesus Christ. It is because Christ is Lord of the Church that covenants made in His name come under His administration and His judgment. It may be a proper understanding of the nature of the covenant to recognize the errors of another but in so doing, the covenant of which I am under seeks the mutual edification of the other and so leaves the government of the Church in Christ's most capable hands.

This is the reason why Baptists hold to covenant membership and why securing it as soon as possible is the right and proper thing to do. It is in the local church that we come under the authority of Christ in community. It is in community where we learn to walk in love and to love as Christ loved us. It is in the local church where we are encouraged to "walk worthy of the Gospel". It is under Christ and in community where we learn to sacrifice, provide for, and give ourselves to the other for the sake of Christ and the furtherance of His Kingdom.

If we are to be a covenant people and take our covenants seriously, then we must be a people who willingly give ourselves to the purposes of Christ in community which seeks to honor His Lordship by our willing obedience and prayerful deliberation. Covenant membership is the manifesting and evidencing of an individual's willingness to become obedient to the call of Christ and so willingly consent to walk together, giving themselves to the Lord and to one another in all humility, meekness, and love. Covenant membership is an act of mutual submission to the authority of Christ. Every covenant signer is responsible for their own actions, and attitude. If each member of the covenant held themselves accountable, what a wonderful church it would be.