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Law and Love

Church Covenants

The End of the Story

- "To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ" "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."— Gal 3: 15-16 & 27-29

Context for Today's Message

- Annual meeting discussion of membership covenant
- Small groups discuss membership covenant
- Summer sermon series on meaningful membership



Acknowledgements

- Timothy Keller, sermon, "A Covenant Relationship"
- "The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline (IX Marks)," Jonathan Leeman and Mark Dever
- "Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community," Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Modern Context-Law

- Synonyms: contract, agreement, undertaking, commitment, guarantee, warrant, pledge, promise, bond, indenture; pact, deal, settlement, arrangement, understanding.
- An agreement, contract, or written promise between two individuals that frequently constitutes a pledge to do or refrain from doing something.
- The individual making the promise or agreement is known as the covenantor, and the individual to whom such promise is made is called the covenantee.

Modern Context-Law (2)

- "Restrictive Covenant."
- English Common Law.
 - Distinct from ordinary contract as evidenced by the presence of a seal.
 - Taken with solemn oaths.
 - Had the distinction of enforceability even without consideration (quid pro quo).

Modern Context-Love

- Mostly influenced by consumerism or sentimentality.
 - Marriage
 - Brotherhood

Biblical Context

- Old Testament
 - Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David
 - Key Elements
 - Parties
 - Divine promise (confirmed with an oath)
 - Terms and conditions, sanctions (blessings and curses)
 - Covenantee response
 - Formalized with a ceremony
 - Genesis 15

New Testament

- "And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"—Luke 22:20
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'-- so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."—Galatians 3:13-14
- Jesus "passed through the pieces" and took the curse!

Application to Christians

- The new covenant has a beautiful blend of law and love
 - Language of law, (promise, oaths, sanctions, ceremony)
 - Language of love, (personal possessive pronouns e.g. our God, His people)
 - "It is more loving and intimate than a merely business relationship, yet more binding, durable, and accountable than a merely personal relationship."



9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (1)

- Identifies us with God.
 - "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God"—Ex 6:7
 - Identification with Christ, e.g. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"—Acts 9:4
 - God gives us a name—Christians
 - "He identifies himself with any group of Christians who gather together and submit their lives to one another in a local church covenant." (ref; Mat 18:20)

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (2)

- Distinguishes us from the world.
 - God as a "divider"
 - Scattering His people, thereby making them indistinct.
 - "Identifying ourselves with a group that has committed to being outcasts and going against the stream."

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (3)

- Guides us into the righteousness of Christ by presenting a standard of personal and corporate righteousness.
 - The "put-offs" and the "put-ons" (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians)
 - The indicatives and the imperatives of Scripture
 - Have we arrived, or are we swimming upstream?
 - "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." —2 Cor 3:18

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (4)

- Acts as a witness to non-Christians.
 - By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.—John 13:35
 - "It means that Christians belong to a [local] church not simply to have their spiritual needs met or to be edified."

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (5)

- Glorifies God and enables us to enjoy His glory.
 - "we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."—1 Thes 2:12
 - "To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."—2 Thes 2:14
 - "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence..."—2 Pet 1:3

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (6)

- Identifies us with Christ's people.
 - Not like a club or business partners, but like family!
 - Adoption, family (father, children, brothers and sisters), fellow workers.
 - "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."—Rom 9:8 (c.f. Gal 3:29)

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (7)

- Assists us in living the Christian life through the accountability of brothers and sisters in the faith.
 - Committing to a group of people who will call me to account.
 - "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."—Gal 6:1-2
 - "I was in a fog...."
 - "Right now, in this moment of sanity, I am giving you my full permission to pursue me relentlessly in my moment of insanity."

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (8)

- Assigns responsibilities to the parties of the covenant.
 - "In the NT we often see the whole church assigned responsibility for matters of dispute, discipline, and doctrine." (Mat 18, 1 Cor 5, Gal 1, 2 Cor 2)
 - Refer to Parker's sermon on Mat 18. "Binding and loosing"
 - We don't just receive, "benefits of membership" (club), but some truly awesome authority and responsibilities!

9 Elements of a Local Church Covenant (9)

- Protects us from the world, the flesh, and the Devil.
 - Compare OT protections for widows, orphans, poor, stranger, and alien. (Ex 22, Lev 19, 25, Deut 24, Deut 10, Num 35, Josh 20)
 - "Contemporary people fear authoritative structures, God provided these authoritative covenantal structures precisely because humans abuse authority."
 - "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."—2 Thes 3:3-5
 - "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."—Gal 6:2

A Local Church Covenant for Clarity

- And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly."—Deut 27:4-8

A Church Covenant for Clarity and Durability

- Cultural context has obscured many of these truths.
- Language can be difficult to transmit meaning.
- We forget.
- We can be blinded.

The Invisible Made Visible

- "The New Covenant of Christ embraces an individual silently and invisibly."
- Christ gave an institutional charter to the Church, not individuals.
- "It's the members of the church who are the true pictures of the forgiveness, love, and authority of the New Covenant."

Summary

- "The commitment believers make to one another to form a local church is a covenant-like commitment. Since Christ has identified them with Him through His new covenant, and since He has authorized them to identify themselves with Him through His charter, they covenant together in such a fashion that His name is protected, and their good is promoted."

Application Postscript

- Are there 12 easy steps?
- How about an "easy button?"
- Is there an "expert" to fix all the problems?
- "Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ."—Dietrich Bonhoeffer from "Life Together."

So Where Do We Go From Here?

- Document is in draft form.
- Several small groups have been reviewing and commenting.
- Personal notes: