**Church Membership**

Week 6

**Schedule:**

Week 1: What is the church and is it important?

Week 2: What is Church Membership and is it important?

Week 3: What are the Church and its members like?

Week 4: What are the responsibilities and privileges of membership?

Week 5: What do we do if a member does not represent Christ?

**Week 6: What do we as members gather around?**

**Introduction:**

1. **Articles of Faith**

**What are “Articles of Faith”?**

Articles of faith are the summary statements of foundational beliefs held by individuals, churches, or ministries. They set forth the essential truths which guide every area of belief and practice. Sometimes articles of faith are called a doctrinal statement, statement of faith, or statement of belief.

One of the earliest articles of faith was given in Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

**Deuteronomy 6:4–7 (ESV) — 4** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

 This early article of faith establishes the unity of God, the supremacy of God, and the priority of serving God.

**Why do you think it is important for a church to have “Articles of faith”?**

**3 Reasons Why A Church Should Have Articles of Faith**

1. **To Protect the Gospel**

The statement protects the gospel when it properly defines what the Good News.  But it also protects the gospel when it properly defines doctrinal positions touching the gospel.  For example, a good statement of faith takes care to state that baptism does not cause regeneration.  It might also help people see that a doctrine like the Trinity matters immensely for our understanding of the Good News and the role each Person in the Trinity plays in redemption.  The protection of the gospel requires we define other key doctrinal positions that bear upon the gospel but are not themselves the gospel.

1. **To Promote Unity among Church Members**

A statement of faith will promote unity among members. It

* protects the teaching of elders against subjective interpretations of Scripture.
* establishes doctrinal essentials (and distinctives).
* provides unifying language to explain complex doctrinal truths.
* identifies what doctrines and distinctives are (and are not) primary to the identity of the church.

1. **To Protect the Future of the Church**

A statement of faith will protect the future of the church. It will:

* establish benchmark standards for the selection of teachers.
* fortify the church against shifting cultural and denominational beliefs.
* train potential members in basic Christian doctrine and distinctives of the church.
* become a tool in the discipline process for those promoting false doctrine.

**Faith Baptist Church’s Articles of Faith**

13. Of the Church

14. Of the Ordinances

15. Of the Lord’s Day

16. Of the Security of the Saints

17. Of the Righteous and the Wicked

18. Of the Second Coming of Christ

19. Of the Resurrection

20. Of Civil Government

21. Of Christian Education

22. Of Social Service

23. Of Human Sexuality

24. Of Abortion

1. Of the Scriptures
2. Of the True God
3. Of the Devil, or Satan
4. Of Creation
5. Of the Fall of Man
6. Of the Virgin Birth
7. Of the Atonement for Sin
8. Of Grace in the New Creation
9. Of God’s Eternal Purpose
10. Of Justification
11. Of Sanctification
12. Of the Harmony of God’s Moral Law

& The Gospel of Grace

1. **Church Constitution**

**What is a constitution?**

Merriam-Webster says:

**a:**the basic principles and laws of a nation, state, or social group that determine the powers and duties of the government and guarantee certain rights to the people in it

**b:**a written instrument embodying the rules of a political or social organization

Why do you think it is important for a church to have a constitution?

**Four Reasons a Church Constitution is Important:**

1. It helps a church run “decently and in order.”

**1 Corinthians 14:40 (ESV) — 40** But all things should be done decently and in order.

In this text Paul insisted that congregational meetings should be without the chaos that comes when nobody knows who’s in charge or what’s happening next. Though a statement of faith can go a long way toward establishing this kind of order, a good constitution fleshes out very basic questions: Who is qualified to be a Pastor or deacon? How are they chosen? Who handles the finances? Can membership be revoked?

1. It helps keep stability in the function of the church.
2. It gives direction during change.
3. It helps the church family stay safe.

In many states, a church that desires non-profit status must have a constitution that describes its rules. In that very practical sense, a church constitution is “necessary.” However, I want to tackle this issue from a slightly different angle. Even if the state did not require a constitution, I’d encourage us to have one anyway.

Some consider such questions boring at best and unspiritual at worst. But clarity here helps sheep feel safe, especially those who have been abused by leadership in the past. A good pastor will tell his congregation, “If I ever commit to teach what is contrary to Scripture, you should get rid of me as quickly as you can.” A well-written constitution tells the congregation how to go about doing just that.

Jesus charged us to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt 1:16). We live in a world where churches come under attack from without and within. Churches committed to obeying Scripture will discipline their members for habitual, unrepentant sin. The procedures for church discipline will be found in a constitution and ought to be affirmed by every member before he or she joins the church. This won’t keep a disgruntled member from suing the church or elders for defamation (or worse), but it is one way to live wisely in a world that rejects biblical morality and may attack a faithful church. (IX Marks)

**Faith Baptist Church’s Constitution addresses:**

1. Name
2. Purpose
3. Articles of Faith
4. Government
5. Membership
6. Officers
7. Duties of Officers
8. Committees
9. Meetings
10. Separation
11. Other Policies
12. Constitution Changes
13. Dissolution

(for full constitution contact office)

1. **Church Covenant**

**CHURCH COVENANT**

1. Paul told Timothy, “watch your life and doctrine closely” (1 Tim 4:16). If a statement of faith is a synopsis of right doctrine, the covenant summarizes right living. The covenant aids church leaders and members by describing what a Christian life looks like. Proper use of a church covenant encourages members to take responsibility for each other’s holiness.
2. After our statement of faith, I’ve found the church covenant to be most helpful in preparing Christians for church membership. They want to know not only what we believe, but also how we agree to live together. Walking through a church covenant is like a stroll through the park of sanctification. Those who don’t like the view quickly discern this isn’t the church for them.
3. We usually read the covenant aloud at my church when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Though this practice isn’t mandated by Scripture, self-examination is (1 Cor 11:28). What better way to do this than by remembering the promises we made to one another when we became members of this particular local church? We didn’t just promise to believe certain things, we agreed to live a certain way.
4. A church covenant is chock-full of commitments, like those about personal integrity, brotherly love, and faithful evangelism. The pursuit of a godly life doesn’t save us—that’s the Spirit’s work through the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. But a changed life is evidence of conversion, and keeping a church covenant front and center is a key way to keep sanctification front and center, too. (IX Marks)

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**INTRODUCTION**

Professional athletic teams usually write a “moral clause” into their players’ contracts that will negate the financial package if the player fails to display at least a modicum of morally upright behavior.  A few years back Jason Kidd was traded by the Phoenix Suns because he was charged with spousal abuse. Jason Kidd’s poor behavior off the court was reflecting poorly on the Phoenix Suns, and the Suns were concerned enough about the public reputation of their organization that they appealed to the moral clause in Kidd’s contract and disassociated themselves from him.

Back in the ‘80s IBM had a detailed dress code to which they required all their salesmen to adhere–dark suit, white shirt, dark tie. They wanted you to know when you were dealing with an IBM man; they wanted a certain image to be associated with their organization so that their corporate identity would have positive associations, and so that their corporate reputation would be excellent in the eye of the public.

These two examples underscore the importance of who we say we are, who we identify with, and how that public message and identification relate to how we actually live. In other words, we have to practice what we preach. And if this is true of the corporate world of computers and athletics, how much more is it true of the church corporately and of the Christian individually?

James warns us that “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless” (Js 1:26).

In other words, if you profess to be a Christian, but you don’t live a changed life, you should take no comfort in your faith. John says “We know that we have come to know him IF we obey his commands” (1John 2:3). In short, how we live matters. In this class, we’re particularly focused on how we live together as members of a local church.

**WHAT IS A ‘CHURCH COVENANT’?**

A church covenant can be described in five different ways.

* A church covenant is a promise – a promise made to God, to a local church, and to one’s self.
* A church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live.  While our statement of faith is a good summary of what we believe, our church covenant is a summary of how we agree to live – more importantly, it is a summary of how God would have us live.  It does not include every explicit command regarding obedience, but it does give a general summary of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ.
* A church covenant is a sign of commitment – a commitment to God, to His church, and to personal holiness.
* A church covenant is an ethical statement.  Historian Charles W. DeWeese writes, “A church covenant is a series of written pledges based on the Bible which church members voluntarily make to God and to one another regarding their basic moral and spiritual commitments and the practice of their faith” (Baptist Church Covenants, p. viii).   One theologian calls church covenants the “ethical counterpart to confessions of faith.”  A church covenant can be an important part of applying a Christian worldview to every aspect of our lives.  Inherent in the purpose of a church covenant is the understanding that church membership involves being held accountable to live in a manner consistent with a common understanding of Scripture.
* A church covenant is a biblical standard.   A church covenant is helpful in a church that is practicing Biblical church discipline.  As members of a church, we exhort one another to live holy lives, and we challenge brothers and sisters persisting in sin.

Conclusion:

Most of us don’t like to think through church documents, especially since we know Jesus is coming back and there is evangelism and discipleship to be done. I agree this is exactly what you want your church focused on.

Nonetheless, it’s worth assembling quality church documents. Picture your evangelism and discipleship ministries as a sports car. Good church documents are like a smooth, solid road underneath the car. When that road is properly maintained, the car is freed up to race to the finish line. But without a first-rate road, the car must slow down and may even need to pull over to replace a tire. Bad roads will inevitably disrupt even the best racecar.

Likewise, a church without good documents may be running fine right now, but without them you’ll soon find yourself distracted from the main mission. So spend some time adopting, refining, and using church documents. In the long run it will help your church focus on what matters most, the gospel.

**Faith Baptist’s Church Covenant**

THE BIBLE EXAMPLE

"They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul." (2 Chronicles 15:12)

PREAMBLE

Having been led as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; having been immersed, upon our profession of faith, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

OUR PLEDGE TO OUR CHURCH

With this in view, we pledge to work together for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and spirituality;

To attend regularly its worship services and as much as possible its other departments;

To sustain its discipline, ordinances and doctrines;

To contribute cheerfully and regularly to its expenses and to the spreading of the Gospel throughout all nations;

We further pledge to walk together in Christian love and watchfulness, giving and receiving admonition with meekness and affection; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to avoid all gossip, backbiting and excessive anger; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and, mindful of the rules of our Savior, to secure it without delay;

To remember each other in prayer and to aid each other in case of sickness or distress;

To unite with some church as soon as possible when we move from this community where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

# OUR PLEDGE TO GOD

We also pledge to maintain family and private devotions;

To religiously educate our children;

To seek the salvation of the lost;

To walk cautiously and uprightly in the world;

To be faithful in our engagements and just in our dealings;

To be exemplary in our deportment;

To abstain from the use and sale of intoxicating drinks as a beverage;

To be zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of God, and to make Christ first in all things both spiritual and temporal.

# OUR SACRED VOW

We promise by the aid of the Holy Spirit to perform the items of this covenant to the best of our ability.