

WHY WE WRITE COVENANTS
AND WHY COVENANTS ARE THE ONLY BASIS FOR OUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH
Some thoughts from Bruce Van Blair

“It is for freedom that Christ set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and refuse to submit again to the yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

Our freedom in Jesus the Christ is never an invitation into anarchy, lethargy, or self-serving dissipation. True freedom means we get to choose who and what we will serve, live for, devote our lives to.

Nearly all churches, Christian structures, and organizations tell their members what they must believe; how they are to think and behave; what they are to contribute, give, produce – in order to be and remain acceptable to the church (and to God).

This can be clarifying and helpful for many people. The problem for us is that this steps between the individual and the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit – who we maintain is supposed to be the light of our lives at every turn and on every level of our existence. The Holy Spirit (of our Risen Christ) is the center and essence of our understanding of being Christ’s Followers – and of our participation in the *ecclesia*, the gathering, the family of Christ’s body on earth.

Hence we each write our own covenant. Our church does not tell anyone what to believe or how to be faithful. We tell our church as honestly as we can the content of our faith and commitment and devotion at this point in our pilgrimage. If we are feeling so called, it might even make sense to covenant to more than one faith community. We then pool our covenants and live with what and who we really are at this point in time.

Life keeps changing and we keep growing, and indeed we are free to change our covenants at any time that seems appropriate to us. But at least once a year it seems important for us to review and renew our covenants in prayerful consideration of our current circumstances.

Of course, we take our covenants very seriously, even though we rejoice in the freedom and grace we receive from Christ. Covenants, after all, are the promises we make to God – in the light of the promises God makes to us.

COVENANT WORKSHEET
Some thoughts from Bruce Van Blair

My favorite concept of covenant writing is a blank sheet of paper, a pen, and some time to pray. That might not yield as smooth and polished a result, but I suspect that simple and honest and heartfelt count more with The Spirit than deathless prose or even better-organized thinking.

Nevertheless, I have been asked to put on paper a few categories for consideration and a few questions under each category – to prime the pump, so to speak. So here we go:

I.) WHAT ABOUT MY SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE COMING YEAR?

How is my prayer life? An obvious question, but one we probably all need to ask regularly – and certainly when we are writing a covenant with God. Do I have a reasonable discipline for daily prayer? Do I carve sufficient time out of each day to talk things over with the Holy Spirit? Renewal and recommitment of our prayer lives is a very appropriate matter to go into our covenants. If this is not attended to, what else in our covenants can really matter?

Do I “study some portion of the Scriptures each day, seeking in grace and praise to discover God’s will for my own life on a daily basis”?

Am I a regular and conscientious part of a Disciple Band? It was a high priority for Jesus. Is that good enough for me?

How am I doing with pruning? Sometimes we cannot grow any further unless we make more room.

II.) HAVE I GOT SOME WAYS TO “BUILD UP THE BODY,” AS PAUL WOULD HAVE SAID?

Consistent attendance is one of the primary ways we bear witness or show our loyalty – to anything. If we are present when possible whenever the faith community gathers for worship, that ends up having a huge impact on the health and life of the church. Do I gather when my faith family gathers?

If I have special interests or abilities in some area of the church’s life, have I written that into my covenant? There are many areas of special responsibility and support in the life of any organization. Most churches want us to wait to be asked. Our covenant system is far more efficient than that: if you are willing, write it in your covenant and “you’re on.”

New Testament letters make it clear that church members prayed for each other – a lot. Do I have people on my prayer list?

III.) DO I PLAN TO INVITE SOMEBODY INTO THE LIFE OF MY CHURCH THIS YEAR?

Such things do not often happen by accident. If we are grateful to be part of this faith family, are there not others who would be grateful too – if they knew, and got a fair taste of it? Of all the ways we know to help somebody, is there any way to help more than to help someone find a faith family? Do I know any “widows or orphans” in the spiritual sense?

Before, during, or after, do I want to invite somebody into my Disciple Band?

IV.) DO I HAVE A MENTOR?

Am I too shy to ask someone to be my Mentor?

Am I too mature to need a Mentor?

V.) HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT MONEY?

Does any of my money belong to God?

Do I want to spend any of my money to support and enhance the life of my church?