

3.

The Church Covenant



The Pledge Of Unity And Love

The first part of the second paragraph reads;

“We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love”

This is a pledge of **unity** in life with one another, and to **love** one another as **Christ** loves us! As members of the same **“body of Christ”** we have a peculiar relationship to each other. Paul states in **Ephesians 4:25** that as members of the same **“body of Christ”** that ***“we are members one of another”*** THIS RELATIONSHIP MEANS THAT WE HAVE OBLIGATIONS TO ONE ANOTHER AS A BODY OF CHRIST!

I. THE PLEDGE OF UNITY

A. Unity Defined:

The phrase ***“walk together”*** conveys the idea of **unity**, which is absolutely essential to the **well-being**, and the **effectiveness** of a **New Testament Baptist Church!** The word ***“together”*** means ***“agreement, and cooperation, oneness, side by side, hand in hand, as one”*** The word ***“unity”*** means ***“in harmony, in accord, uniformly, jointly, in conjunction, in partnership, in league, and solidarity”*** This ***“unity”*** is absolutely necessary in order

“to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort”

This ***“unity”*** is absolutely necessary in order to

“promote its prosperity and spirituality”

This ***“unity”*** is absolutely necessary in order

“to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines”

THE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST CANNOT AND WILL NOT **BE** AND **DO** WHAT IT OUGHT WITHOUT UNITY! THE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST CANNOT AND WILL NOT **FUNCTION** PROPERLY WITHOUT UNITY!

1. This Unity Is Described As Being Of One Heart And Soul [Acts 4:32].

2. This Unity Is Described As Being Of The Same Mind [Romans 12:16].

Paul further describes this as being ***“likeminded”*** and of ***“one mind”*** [**Romans 15:5-6; II Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2; I Peter 3:8**]. This means ***“to think the same thing”*** and implies ***“unity of sentiment, opinion, and plan”*** In **Philippians 3:15** Paul spoke of those who are ***“otherwise minded”***

3. This Unity Is Described As Being Perfectly Joined Together In Mind And Judgment [I Corinthians 1:10].

4. This Unity Is Described As Living In Peace [II Corinthians 13:11; I Thessalonians 5:13].

5. This Unity Is Described As The Bond Of Peace [Ephesians 4:3].

The “*bond of peace*” speaks of a relationship, a tie, a link, a friendship, a fellowship, a partnership, an association, an attachment, and an interrelationship.

6. This Unity Is Described As One Body And The Whole Body [I Corinthians 12:12,13, 20; Ephesians 4:4, 16].

7. This Unity Is Described As Being Tempered, Framed, And Joined Together [I Corinthians 12:24; Ephesians 2:21 4:16].

Notice the phrase “*God hath tempered the body together*” The word “*tempered*” means “*to commingle, and to combine together*” Notice the phrase “*fitly framed together*” meaning “*compactly joined together*” Notice the phrase “*fitly joined together and compacted*” The word “*compacted*” means “*to knot together*”

8. This Unity Is Described As Being In One Spirit And One Mind, And Striving Together [Philippians 1:27].

9. This Unity Is Described As Being In One Accord: [Philippians 2:2].

10. This Unity Is Described As Walking By The Same Rule: [Philippians 3:16].

B. The Characteristics Of Unity:

1. It Is Good And Pleasant [Psalm 133:1].

The word “*good*” has reference to that which is “*excellent, acceptable, right, praiseworthy, and admirable*” The word “*pleasant*” has reference to that which is “*enjoyable, satisfying, pleasing, and gratifying*”

2. Unity Is Like Precious Oil [Psalm 133:2].

The nature of oil is to heal that which is wounded, and to soften that which is hard, and a spirit of unity within the church will accomplish both.

3. Unity Is For The Good Of The People Of God [Jeremiah 32:39].

This means that unity is “*wholesome, healthy, nourishing, and beneficial*” Unlike division within the *church*, unity gives liberty to the preaching of the Word, and enables people to

properly hear the preaching of the Word, all of which is beneficial to the spirituality of the Lord's church [**I Corinthians 3:1-2**].

4. *Unity Is Edifying To The Church* [**Ephesians 4:12**].

5. *Unity Promotes Fellowship, Which In Turn Produces Joy* [**Philippians 2:1; I John 1:3-4**].

C. The Exhortation To Unity:

Paul wrote to the church at *Corinth* in **I Corinthians 1:10** “*that there be no divisions among you*” and in **I Corinthians 1:11** “*that there be no contentions among you*” and in **I Corinthians 12:25** “*That there should be no schism (divisions) in the body*” He wrote to the church at *Ephesus* in **Ephesians 4:3** “*Endeavouring (this speaks of earnest and industrious effort) to keep (guard) the unity of the Spirit*” WHERE UNITY EXISTS, THERE MUST BE AN ENDEAVOR TO KEEP IT!

1. *In Order To Keep Unity Of The Spirit Let Nothing Be Done Through Strife* [**Philippians 2:3**].

“*Strife*” is of the flesh [**I Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 5:20**]. It is “*contention*” and is something that is stirred up! To “*stir up strife*” is to “*excite or incite the feelings of*” In order to have unity there must be **the avoidance of having our actions controlled by strife**, and there must be **the avoidance of those things that stir up strife**.

(a). *Hatred (ill will toward others) Stirs Up Strife* [**Proverbs 10:12**].

(b). *Wrath (the display of extreme anger) Stirs Up Strife* [**Proverbs 15:18; 30:33**].

(c). *Grievous Words (painful and hurtful words) Stir Up Strife* [**Proverbs 15:1**].

Grievous words are inclusive of talebearing [**Proverbs 11:13; 17:9; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20**], evil whispering [**Proverbs 16:28; 26:22**], slander [**Proverbs 10:18**], hasty words [**Proverbs 29:20**], and malicious words [**III John 10**]. Part of “*endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit*” is guarding the tongue, making sure that we speak right words [**Job 6:25**], and appropriate words [**Proverbs 25:11**].

(d). *Anger Stirs Up Strife* [**Proverbs 29:22**].

The Bible gives warning to be slow to anger [**Proverbs 15:18; 16:32**], and such will prevent many problems for one's self and for others! Anger in and of itself is not sinful, as Paul makes a distinction between being angry and sinning [**Ephesians 4:26**]. Emotions, including the emotion of anger become destructive when they are not expressed in harmony with the principles of God! Anger not expressed properly is destructive, either to one's self or to others or both! Anger is sinful and destructive when it is **released without control** [**Proverbs 14:17, 29; 19:11; 25:28; 29:11, 20, 22**]. Anger is sinful and destructive when it is **repressed (turned inward)** and this seems to be what Paul was talking about when he said “*let not the sun go down upon your wrath*” [**Ephesians 4:26**]. He is saying GET RID OF GRUDGES DAILY! Not to do so is to “*give place to the devil*” [**Ephesians 4:27**]. Repressed anger allows the devil to make inroads

into your life! The danger of repressed **anger** is that it can determine your perception, it can determine what you see, how you see others, how you view life, and it can determine what you do! **James** wrote in **James 5:9** “*Grudge (malice and or resentment) not one against another*”

2. In Order To Keep The Spirit Of Unity Leave Off Contention [Proverbs 17:14].

To leave off contention one must avoid those things that lead to contention, such as **pride** [Proverbs 13:10], a **hasty spirit** [Proverbs 14:29], **indiscretion** [Proverbs 19:11], and a **contentious spirit** [Proverbs 26:21]. A “*contentious spirit*” is a “*spirit of disagreement and battle*” and is one and the same with a “*froward man*” [Proverbs 16:28], such a spirit is counter-productive to **unity!**

3. In Order To Keep To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit Let Nothing Be Done Through Vain Glory [Philippians 2:3; I Peter 3:9].

“*Vainglory*” is the desire for personal **honor**, the desire for **attention**, **praise**, and **preeminence**. It is “*the desire to make self the main object*” If a church is to enjoy the spirit of **unity**, then it is imperative that each and every member avoid the desire for “*vainglory*” The Word of God condemns such a spirit [Proverbs 17:19; 25:6-7,27; Obadiah 4; Matthew 23:12; Luke 22:24; John 5:44; III John 9]. **Christ** serves as an example of rising above “*vainglory*” He said in **John 5:30** “*I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me*” and in **John 5:41** “*I receive not glory from men*” and in **John 6:38** “*I am not come to do mine own will*” and in **John 8:50** “*I seek not mine own glory*”

4. In Order To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit There Must Be A Spirit Of Deep Humility [Philippians 2:3].

The **humble** individual has a vivid realization of their own personal sin and unworthiness, and feel no self-sufficiency in and of themselves, but realize that their sufficiency is in the **Lord** [II Corinthians 3:5]. A spirit of **humility** will result in an attitude of **self-denial**, a **putting off** the old man [Ephesians 4:22].

5. In Order To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit There Must Be A Putting Others Ahead Of Self [Philippians 2:4].

6. In Order To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit There Must Be A Seeking Of Heavenly Wisdom [James 3:13-18].

7. In Order To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit There Must Be A Marking Of Those Who Cause Division [Romans 16:17-18].

II. CHRISTIAN LOVE

A. Christian Love Defined:

“*Christian love*” is the love of **Christ!** The phrase;

“*We engage therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love*”

is a pledge to strive by the help of the *Holy Spirit* to imitate the very **love of Christ** and this is a **unified** effort! This **love** is the greatest of all graces [**I Corinthians 13:13**], and without it all “*religion*” is vain and empty [**I Corinthians 13:1-3**]. *Christ* issues a call to imitate His **love** [**John 13:34; 15:12**], and Paul extends the call [**Ephesians 5:2**]. THE IMITATION OF CHRIS’S LOVE IS CHRISTIAN LOVE! And this “*Christian love*” is key to living the life that the child of God is to live, and it is the basis of fulfilling the *Church Covenant*. It is this “*Christian love*” that keeps the life and service of a child of God from becoming mechanical and routine! It is this “*Christian love*” that causes service to the Lord to be **fervent**, and **passionate!** It is this “*Christian love*” that gives service to the Lord its **glow** and **excitement!**

1. Christ Loved The Father And Christian Love Is Inclusive Of Love To God:

(a). *Love To God Is Commanded* [**Deuteronomy 11:1; Joshua 22:5; Psalm 31:23**].

(b). *Love To God Is To Be Entire* [**Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37**].

(c). *Love To God Is To Be Sincere* [**Ephesians 6:24**].

(d). *Love To God Is To Be Preeminent* [**Psalm 73:25**].

(e). *Love To God Is Active* [**I Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 6:10**].

Love for **God** will produce **obedience to God** [**Deuteronomy 30:20; John 14:15, 21, 23-24**], and will make duty to God a pleasure [**I John 5:3**]. Love for **God** will cause one to **hate sin** [**Psalm 97:10**], and to **love God’s people** [**I John 4:20; 5:1**].

The greater the degree of **love to God**, the greater the **commitment** to Him, the greater the extent of **surrender** to Him, and the greater the **willingness** to follow Him, to obey Him, to glorify Him, to praise Him and to worship Him! The greater the degree of **love to God**, the greater the degree of love to His **Word**, His **Law**, His **day**, and His **people!** The greater the degree of **love to God**, the greater the **desire** to please Him in all things, and the greater the desire for His **will**, and the greater the desire to **know** Him more fully, and to make Him known to others! The greater the degree of **love to God**, the more that one wants to be identified with Him! The greater the degree of **love to God**, the more that God and the things of God become a **priority**, and the greater the interest in Him! The greater the degree of **love to God**, the greater the **zeal** for Him! The greater the degree of **love to God**, the more able one is to **endure** in the cause of God!

2. Christ Loved His Church And Christian Love Is Inclusive Of Such [**Ephesians 5:25**].
[**Ephesians 5:25**].

3. Christ Loved The People Of God And Christian Love Is Inclusive Of Such:

(a). *Love To God And The People Of God Are The Cornerstone And Heart Of Service To God* [Matthew 22:37-40; I Timothy 1:5].

(b). *Love To The Saints Of God Is A By-Product Of The New Birth* [I John 3:14].

(c). *Love To The Saints Of God Is A By-Product Of The Teaching Of God* [I Thessalonians 4:9].

B. The Characteristics Of Christian Love:

Paul in **I Corinthians 13:4-8** illustrates the nature of love, by giving a **sixteen-fold** description of the characteristics of **love**. This is a description of *Christ's love* imitated and exemplified.

1. Love Suffereth Long:

This speaks of **slowness to anger** and **forbearance** when tried and when wronged. Love is not quick to take offense. Love has the ability to bear much, and is ready to forgive. This is opposed to haste in becoming angry and irritable.

2. Love Is Kind:

Love is **good-natured, gentle, affectionate, courteous, and polite**. Love is **useful, serving, and gracious**. It has no desire for revenge, but desires good for others, and to do good to others. LOVE IS ACTIVE GOODWILL!

3. Love Does Not Envy:

Jealousy or envy implies selfishness, but love rises above the spirit of selfishness and delights to see another honored and esteemed. Love does not harbor ill feelings toward the good welfare and happiness of others, but rather delights in such.

4. Love Vaunteth Not Itself:

The phrase "*vaunteth not itself*" has reference to a feeling of superiority over others which leads to a feeling of contempt and disregard for others. Love corrects a feeling of superiority over others.

5. Love Is Not Puffed Up:

This refers to the expression of a feeling of superiority! Love does not feel superior, nor does it act superior.

6. Love Does Not Behave In An Unseemly Way:

That which is "*unseemly*" is **improper** and **disgraceful**. Love seeks that which is **proper** or **becoming** in all circumstances and relations. Love shows proper **respect** and proper **regard** for others. Love will avoid the profane and the indecent. Love cares about others and is mannerly.

7. Love Seeketh Not Her Own:

Nothing describes the nature of love more accurately than the phrase “*seeketh not her own*” It is this aspect of love that **Paul** spoke of to the church at **Rome** [**Romans 15:1-3**], and to the church at **Philippi** [**Philippians 2:4**].

8. Love Is Not Easily Provoked:

Love is not easily roused to anger, that is, love does not readily give way to anger. When one is under the influence of love they do not give way to sudden bursts of anger.

9. Love Thinketh No Evil:

Love puts the best possible construction on the motives and the conduct of others. Love does not immediately put a bad construction upon the act of another without facts. Love does not immediately assume that the intentions of another are evil. Love does not seek to find fault, and does not seek opportunities to be critical.

10. Love Rejoiceth Not In Iniquity:

Love does not find delight or pleasure in the faults and sins of those loved. Love does not find pleasure in the report that someone has fallen into sin. Love finds no pleasure when an individual brings dishonor upon their profession of faith.

11. Love Rejoiceth In The Truth:

The word “*truth*” as used here stands opposed to “*iniquity*” Love finds pleasure and delight in the virtues of others. Love is pleased and rejoices when others do what is right. Love is not cynical.

12. Love Beareth All Things:

With regard to the errors and faults of others, the disposition of love is not to reveal but to conceal and to bear with others.

13. Love Believeth All Things:

With regard to the conduct of others, love is prone to put the best construction upon their conduct. This does not mean that the one who loves makes no discrimination in regard to things to be believed; or that he is as prone to believe a falsehood as the truth; or that he makes no effort to inquire what is true and what is false. The one who is under the influence of love chooses to put the best construction on the behavior of others until they know otherwise.

14. Love Hopeth All Things:

Love hopes that all will turn out well concerning those loved. When appearances are not right, love hopes that matters may be explained and made clear, so that one’s conduct may prove to be pure. Love will hold on to this hope until all possibility of such be removed.

15. Love Endureth All Things:

Love bears up under all trials, testings, afflictions, tribulations, temptations, and persecutions. LOVE WILL SIMPLY NOT STOP!

16. *Love Never Faileth:*

This speaks of the **value** of such love! Who can possibly measure the value of such a love upon the lives of individuals, and upon the churches of the lord Jesus Christ? THIS LOVE IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN THE KEEPING OF THE CHURCH COVENANT!

The power of the indwelling ***Holy Spirit*** working in the life of the individual provides the strength and ability to fulfill the duties of the ***Church Covenant***. The spirit behind the entire ***Church Covenant*** is **love to the Lord**, and **love to one another**. Behind every feature and detail of the ***Church Covenant*** is this love! NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF TRUE CHRISTIAN LOVE!