

The Covenant Church as a Movement

- ‘Every movement which is likely to last beyond the reach of its originators must start with convictions too strong to be silenced and then have it ... unfold into a more or less simple or complex *modus vivendi*, a way on which many may walk together toward what seems a common goal.

David Nyvall, “Covenant Ideals”

What Lies at the Heart and Soul of the Covenant Movement?

“The image or soul of a people is not easily portrayed. It is an elusive spirit rising out of the collective life of the group. It is never found pure even in the best representatives. Sometimes one catches a glimpse of the soul in the worst representatives. It is a mysterious spirit rising from the life together in the group and never monopolized by an individual, even the recognized leader. It is, perhaps, best to say that it must be felt rather than analyzed as cognitive knowledge.

“The soul has no voice of its own. It must express itself through forms, in nature, [in] structures of human life with more or less accuracy. It is a fact of life which every artist and thoughtful person recognizes as something imprisoned within the resistant stuff of life. Therefore, there is need of looking and listening—as one looks and listens at the seaside—if one is to hear the soul in the overtones and accents of our life and work. This soul is [the early Covenanters] legacy to us—not the particular forms of their thought but their experience of God and their undying love for Jesus.”

Eric G. Hawkinson, *Images in Covenant Beginnings* (1968), p. 17

Exploring Covenant Affirmations: Core Values for Christian Living



- Affirmations Held in Common
- The Centrality of the Word of God
- The Necessity of New Birth
- Commitment to the Whole Mission of the Church
- A Fellowship of Believers & Conscious Dependence on the Spirit
- The Reality of Freedom in Christ

“Drawing, Developing, & Deploying Disciples of Christ”
through Salem Covenant Church

Exploring Covenant Affirmations:

What We Hold in Common with All Christians

We are an apostolic church

We are a catholic church

We are a Reformation church

We are an evangelical church

We are an apostolic church

- 'Because we confess Jesus Christ and the faith of the apostles as recorded in the Holy Scriptures'
2 Timothy 3:16, 17

- 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'
Acts 2:42

We are a catholic church

- Catholic meaning “universal,” belonging to the classic Christian tradition

Psalm 119:63

- Covenant is non-creedal, though centrist; bound together to classical Christianity
- Classic Creeds and Confessions (Apostolic, Nicene, Augsburg Confession) are useful as guides, but not binding

- Creeds, like textbooks, should be kept young, subject to revision in light of the richer flora and fauna of Scripture itself.

- Christians must not read Scripture through the lens of a creed. They must rather read, use, and judge creedal language through the lens of Scripture.

- ‘The New Testament, not being in any formal way a confessional, is everywhere brimful of life, of experience out of which confessions are made, whenever needed.’

● “Covenant piety has emerged in a conscious communal setting where propositional truths and even traditional norms, though meaningful, have carried less weight than the process of living together as a family of faith and applying principle to life through shared reflection and day to day decisions...” Karl A. Olsson, *Into One Body by the Cross* (1985), pp x-xii

● ‘ Give us any old, any new convincing interpretation of truth, and we have already adopted it by having adopted the New Testament faith ... the only workable formula for an all-inclusive unity of believers.’ David Nyvall,

“Covenant Ideals.”

We are a Reformation church

- “We see ourselves standing in the mainstream of the Protestant Reformation, particularly with reference to:
 - * the doctrine that justification is by faith alone, through grace alone;
 - * Scripture is final authority; and
 - * the priesthood of all believers.

Later Historic Influences

- Shaped also by Pietism, a 17th century renewal movement rooted in Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* (1606), later developed in Europe by Philipp Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke, whose influence spread to Scandinavia and our forebears.
- They were responding religiously and institutionally to what had become a rather rigid and lifeless Protestant orthodoxy.

- 'Pietism, in seeking a balance between the head and the heart, affirmed that correct doctrine is a necessary though not sufficient condition for vital and growing faith.'

- Phillipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705) challenged a church that had become rigid in its orthodoxy to seek renewal through:

1. more widespread reading and study of the Bible;
2. greater lay participation in the work of the church;
3. simple, clear, and direct preaching geared to laity;
4. the abandonment of theological hair-splitting
in favor of practical concern for living the Christian life.

- August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) became the institutional genius of Pietism—its social conscience as a pastor, educator, and founder of homes for the needy.

We are an evangelical church

- Influenced also by 19th & 20th century revivalism, proclaiming new birth and new life in Jesus Christ.
- Biblical but not doctrinaire
- A life-oriented communal movement of believers, set free to be ourselves yet bound in Christ to one another and the whole Christian Church
- Local churches seen as autonomous, but not independent
- Mission oriented as a people, at home and abroad
- Bound to “doing together what we cannot do as well alone”—locally, regionally, and denominationally; thus our earliest name, “Mission Covenant.”

Next Sessions

Focus in the next five sessions is on Central Covenant Affirmations, i.e., life-oriented principles that have been both central in Covenanters' experience as believers in Christ and basic to their organization and thought:

- Scripture as the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct;
- the necessity of new birth;
- commitment to the whole mission of the church;
- the church as a fellowship of believers;
- conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit; and
- the reality of freedom in Christ.

Next Week's Assignment

Read Prep Sheet
for

The Centrality of the Word of God

and

frame a written response
to the

Discussion Questions

Closing Prayer

“Our Father, we give you glad thanks for this unbelievable, imperishable, unmerited fellowship. Help us to continue to enjoy each other as we pasture in your meadows, in places that have been made available to us through your grace, because you love us—not because we earned it, but because you love us, because you are who you are. And help us to love each other even when we disagree, even when we see things differently, understanding that we are sheep of the same Shepherd, even our Lord Jesus Christ.... Amen.”