

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

The Church as a Fellowship of Believers & A Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit



People of God

- The seed of Abraham (Genesis 17:2,6):
“This is my covenant with you. You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.... I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout all generations.”
- The body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13):
“For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Gathered and Being Gathered

- In one sense invisible:

“It is the company of the redeemed who make up the great family of God ... Some now living on earth and some in heaven We call it invisible because God alone knows who belongs to it.”

- In another sense, however, the Church must be visible:

“Here on earth the Church is always a visible reality ... a company of Christian people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.”

According to Thy Word, pp 295,396

Early Covenant Understandings

- “The church, in the New Testament sense of the word, is not a building erected for the worship of God, nor an organization of people more or less interested therein and supporting it. The church is vastly more than that;
- “It is made up of persons who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, Lord, and master, persons who are resolved to follow, obey, and serve him, and have united into a Christian [fellowship] open to all true followers of Christ.”

Believing Goes with Belonging

- Faith must be personal, but it is not private

“Faith is experienced in community. It cannot be lived in seclusion; to be a Christian is to be a member of the Body of Christ and to share in the *koinonia* of the Spirit. The grace of God reaches us through the ministry of others and calls us into a ministry to others.”

Everyone Called by God

- “The choosing of Israel was a free act of God (Deut 7:6), and the calling of people to Christ is the free work of the same God (John 6:44).
- “For this reason I am reluctant to speak of the voluntary principle of church membership. I am not sure there are any volunteers for Jesus in the New Testament....

Everyone Sent by God

- “Translated into life, [the volunteer principle] gets too easily controlled by prejudice, preferences, and likability. Persons who come to church are, in my view, better described as being “sent” by the God of Israel and Jesus so that not a whole lot is left up to human preference....
- “The relationship is dialectical and therefore, as Kierkegaard said, filled with passion, and not all of it holy. After all, it is never simple to work out one’s own salvation, especially when it cannot be done **except in community.**” C. John Weborg, in *Servant Leadership*, p. 123

Belonging Can Take Time

- “ A person must be introduced to the body of Christ as well as to [Christ its] head ... (Acts 2:41; 2:47; 5:14). Only when an individual begins to draw ... resources from the body can we have assurance of [their] salvation. The actual conversion, may in some cases, take place after a person has been introduced to the Christian fellowship....
- “However , our work of introducing a person to Christ is not complete until the person we are visiting has become an active participant in a Christian fellowship.”

Wesley W. Nelson, *Learning to Love People*, p. 29

Companionship in the Spirit

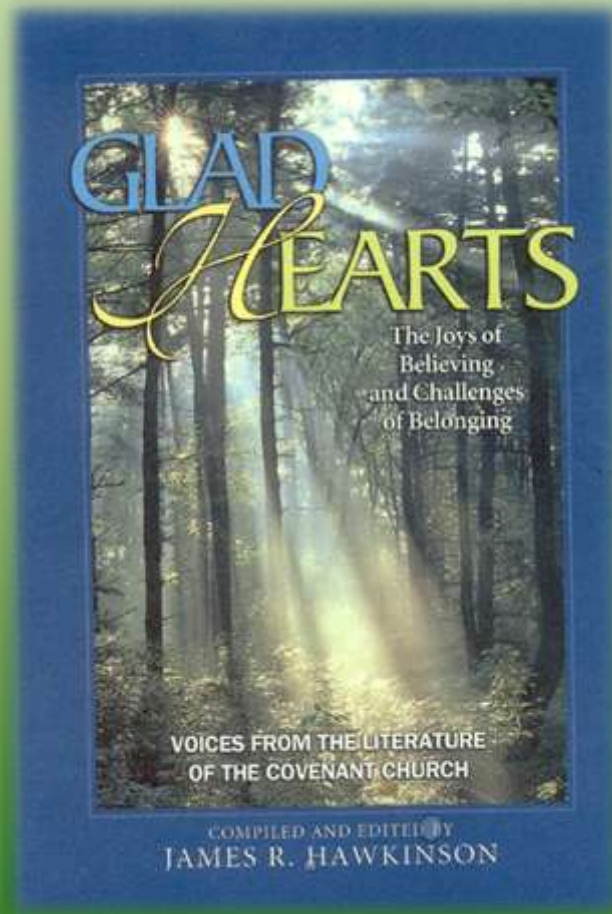
- “The ideal church, therefore, is a close-knit body, like a family that is always there to care, to minister, to discipline, and to reach out in love to one another. The head of the family is Christ, whose love holds the entire family together in ties ... stronger than flesh and blood.
- “The love will be nurtured by the Holy Spirit, who lives in the members of the body. This same love will reach out to people who have not yet begun to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior ... the motive for evangelism.”

What of Tensions and Divisions?

- What happens when “the faithful decide not to unite with the faithful in [a given place], even though they hear the same Word of God and do the same work together but not under the aegis of the congregation?”
- What happens when, as Paul says, we “wander without regard” to our brothers and sisters? Are we “born of God” then? Can it be said of us that we have “gone through the door of the sheepfold, or jumped its walls?”

'Are Not the Saints a Trifle Confusing?'

The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook, No. 472



*' May God,
from whom all grace comes,
fill our dead, cold, lukewarm,
empty, narrow, sluggish,
careless, false, hypocritical,
unfaithful, doubting, frivolous,
erring, godless, corrupted,
dispirited, depressed, sorrowful,*

glad hearts ,


L Peterson, Princeton, IL, 1871

To Live in Christ is to Live by His Spirit in His Church

- We are first of all, by God's grace, God's people.
- No longer our own, we have been bought with a price, the life, death, resurrection, and coming again of Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and demands to be our Lord.
- The promised Holy Spirit has also been sent among us to both form our attitudes and draw us to one another in Christ.
- The key to the unity of the church does not lie in our agreements with one another but in our willingness to be formed by the Word and Spirit.

A Case Study

- C. J. Nyvall (1829-1904) was one of the most influential figures in forming the Covenant, both in Sweden (1878) and in America (1885).
- He often described himself as a man “in between” many of more brittle theological persuasion who didn’t believe he was a Christian and more formal State Church types who hadn’t yet experienced new life in Jesus.
- The attached letter, sent while on an 1871 journey in America to believers back in Sweden “concerning the strife which at present persists among us,” is one of the finest examples we have of the Pietist spirit embedded in those who founded the Mission Covenant.



A letter written by C. J. Nyvall (1829-1904) while traveling in America (1876) to fellow Christians back in Sweden concerning the strife among them. One of the finest examples I know of the Pietist spirit embedded in those who founded the Covenant.

■ I would like to say a few words, beloved friends, regarding the strife which at present persists among us: about the right conception of the gospel on the one hand and the common church life on the other, or rather about our own attitudes toward each other when we are unable to think alike in these matters. Oh, how important it is to heed the Lord's admonition and see to it "that we are not mutually devoured!"

Beloved friends, you who have had your eyes opened to the dear gospel somewhat more than others, remember that even those who do not see things exactly as you do may yet live the life in Christ. Watch out that you do not judge as slaves of the law those whom God counts as his children. It would not be a truly evangelical conduct and it fits in poorly with your confession. If you have a reasonable doubt about a person's life in grace, do not, at least, talk about it behind his back. It is certainly a precarious thing to judge the spiritual condition of others, unless one would conclude as did Paul: "God is able to make them steadfast." I have actually observed among three evangelical and intimate friends that one considered the third an evangelical brother while the second thought of him as a slave of the law.

No, my dear friends, the life of grace in others is a condition which we cannot always evaluate, partly because of our own inadequacy and partly because of varying circumstances among the children of grace. This ought to make us not only cautious but actually thankful to the Lord that he has not set us to judge over others. May we instead judge ourselves, test ourselves, and see if we ourselves are in the faith. Many are able to utter evangelical speech with their tongues while their minds are governed by pharisaical pride. Others can be quite zealous against the use of exaggerated and in-biblical expressions and at the same time in their hearts be enemies of the gospel. That which is not manifest in these people but that which is not good is not discerned even by themselves. What if I am such a man—*to you!* If we do not fear for ourselves and beseech the Lord to test our lives, we are guilty of serious neglect. However, I do not mean by this that God's children in general do not recognize each other (cf. 1 John 5:1). And I do not mean either that we shall be able to have peace with false brethren. But we are least exposed to that danger the more we walk in fear for our own selves, and that, at the same time, is also the sure way by which the falseness in others is discerned.

Therefore the real children of God have peace among themselves, something that is so highly necessary that without it everything is but sham, and we, with all our zeal for the kingdom of God, disgrace the gospel of peace and bring condemnation upon ourselves. Peace within the group does not mean that all think alike and interpret all things alike, each wishing to see, as it were, his own reflection in another, but it does mean that each one recognizes his brother *in Christ*, whatever else the condition may be. It is not the identity in thought and comprehension of all possible particulars that constitutes that perfect bond by which we love one another; that bond, rather, is the mutual, that condition to which we are born from above.

May the Lord open our eyes to his blessedness on the one hand and to the deceit of the devil on the other so that we be not caught in the snare. Cease to bear arms against brethren and thank God for the dear gospel which he in great mercy and faithfulness has committed to us and use your war energy to the end that many more may become partakers of the same gospel and be blessed.

C. J. Nyvall (1829-1904), *Travel Memories from America, 1876*, E. Gustav Johnson, tr. (1959), pp. 19,20,21.

Next Week's Assignment

Read Prep Sheet
for

The Reality of Freedom in Christ

and

frame a written response

to the

Discussion Questions

Closing Prayer

The Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook, No 021

“Lord, call us into the church. Call us in often,
and teach us the old words and old songs with
their new meanings.

“Lord, give us new words for the words we wear
out. Give us new songs for those that have
lost their spirit. Give us new reasons for
coming in and for , into our streets and to our
homes.

(continued)

“As the house of the Lord once moved like a tent through the wilderness, so keep our churches from becoming rigid.

“Make our congregation alive and free.

“Give us ideas we never had before,
so that alleluias and gloria and amen
are like the experiences we know
in daily living.

“Alleluia! O Lord, be praised!

“In worship and in work, be praised! Amen.