

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

Summary Thus Far

- The Covenant as a movement in the larger body of Christ, not an end in itself but “a valid New Testament way of proceeding.”
- Each of the Affirmations may be seen in that light—what we hold in common with the whole body of Christ (that we are an apostolic, catholic, Reformation, and evangelical church), and the special emphases which have grown out of our roots and common experience:
 - The centrality of the Word of God;
 - The necessity of new birth;
 - Commitment to the whole mission of the church;
 - The church as a fellowship of believers & Dependence on the Holy Spirit; and finally
 - The reality of freedom in Christ

God's Word and New Birth

- “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5,6).

The Whole Mission of the Church

- Jesus came and said to them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

A Fellowship of Believers

- “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Conscious Dependence on the Holy Spirit

- “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe” (John 6:63-64a)
- “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God...” (Romans 8:14-17a).

Finally, The Reality of Freedom in Christ

- In an earlier session in this series dealing with “The Necessity of New Birth,” an affirmation central to the Covenant Church’s understanding of what it means to be a Christian, Lesslie Newbigen in *Sin and Salvation* pointed out that sin separates us all:
 - * from God;
 - * from nature;
 - * from others;
 - * even from ourselves.
- Since we bound by the sin that creates such separation in each of our lives, we must be “born again” to new life in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

How God Has Delivered His People

- God's redemptive work was shown in driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden so that they would not live in their sin forever.
- God acted in the time of Noah to make a new beginning for his creation.
- God called Abram out of the Ur of the Chaldees to become the father of many people.
- God sent Moses to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt.
- God called Judges, Prophets, and Kings in later times to deliver his people time and again.

New Testament Promises and Witness

- Jesus said, “If you continue in my word ... you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31).
- Consider the Apostle Paul’s ode to the fact that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21)
- “The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free,” Paul says of his own experience in Romans 8:2.
- And later he insists: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Covenant Understandings

- Biblically aware, Covenanters have understood true freedom to be only “in Christ.” By his grace he is able to make a person, as Luther says, into “a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” At the same time, he is able to make the same person “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”
- “Not as a mark of preference, but as the common birthright the church is free. Freedom is not a privilege to boast of but an accomplishment, of all accomplishments, the last to mature.” (David Nyvall)

Note the Tension

- Bound to be free, i.e., freed by Christ from our bondage to sin but bound to Christ in a whole new “way of life” (Ephesians 2:10).
- Think of it, at one and the same time, as being set free in Christ from all man-made restrictions, only to be “bound to a whole new Christ-centered spirit and way of living.”
- The Apostle Paul’s dual reminder in his first letter to the Corinthians comes to mind: that “all things are lawful but not all things are helpful”, which he illustrates in many ways (see e.g. chapter 8:1-13).

Good Reminders from our Literature

- “The biblical answer lies in taking the focus off ourselves and placing it on the life of God’s Spirit within the believing fellowship” (Donald C. Frisk)
- “God wants his children to be themselves, and he gives them that right. Yet what he gives is always for a purpose—that they might serve not themselves, but his mission in the world and the body into which he has brought them by his grace.”

Covenant Affirmations (Booklet, 1976, rev. 1996)

- “Christ has set us free from sin and death so that we might really be free to grow in the Spirit. Such freedom expresses itself in *new life, new light, and new love..*”

Glenn P. Anderson, from Bound to Be Free, pp. 27,37

True Freedom Requires Maturity

- “We must not offend our brothers and sisters by our actions, but we also must not permit the church to be enslaved by advocating restrictions on legitimate Christian freedom...”
- “Is the membership prepared to accept new people in Christ who come from different cultural backgrounds? Does your church have an “in” group that conforms very much to similar cultural patterns? Do those who are not in this group receive just as much attention and love? These are questions to guide us in prayer rather than in discussion. (Wesley W. Nelson, *earning to Love People*, p. 24)

In Conclusion

- The heart of all life worth living lies in our relationship to a Triune God, who has fearfully and wonderfully made us, fearfully and wonderfully provided for our redemption, and just as fearfully and wonderfully promised through his Holy Spirit never to leave us or forsake us.
- Whether and to what extent we keep believing in him, accepting his grace, and living by his Spirit will determine not only our ultimate destiny but the redeeming quality of our life here and now.

The Rest Is Up to You!

- Affirming all God has done—and still is offering to do—for you, i.e. both going out from it and coming in to it day by day is the key both to living faith and faithful living.
- Refusing all he has done and offers still to you, or trivializing it by paying more attention to lesser things, will only diminish in you the life God longs for all his creatures to have.
- Tend your roots if you want to renew your wings:
“Roots exist for the wings that propel them into life as we know it, and wings exist to magnify the creative power of roots within them”

Closing Prayer

You have taught us, O God, and are teaching us still, that the road is narrow that leads to life, and few there are who find it.

Restore in us the joy of our salvation, and uphold us with your free Spirit.

Then will we teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will be converted to you. Amen.