

Think of the Covenant ...

- not as a static thing but as a *movement*:
 - * rooted in the faith of the Apostles;
 - * catholic in the sense of universal;
 - * emerging from the Reformation emphasis on justification by grace alone through faith alone and Pietism's insistence on the manifestation of new life in Christ;
 - * Influenced by though not absorbed into late 19th and 20th century Revivalism and the Evangelical Movement.

Think of Salem...

- not as a static thing, all by itself, but as part of that *movement* -- part and parcel in thought and life of the larger Covenant, still dedicated to what its forebears saw as “a valid New Testament way of proceeding”;
- indeed, a living, breathing part of the whole body of Christ, devoting itself currently to:
 - * “drawing,
 - * “developing, and
 - * “deploying disciples of Christ.”

Note the Active Tense – “Believing”

- “In the view of [our forebears] faith was more than an act with a past tense. It was for them a beginning and remained hopefully in progress as a dynamic relationship to the Christ of the word. Never, in time, could believing become anything but embattled. This was their creative focus. Churchmanship came later and somewhat reluctantly. Their records indicate a deepening awareness of sin and frailty as they matured as Christians

Faith as Believing

- “If an anxious seeker was told, ‘Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved,’ that person would often stop at the word ‘believe’ and get no further. He was then admonished to put the emphasis on Christ and insofar as Christ was apparent to him a living faith was born. Thus the dialogue about faith could only be resolved by meeting the personal Christ. ‘One must never put faith in one’s own faith.’ C.M. Youngquist, *Missions-Vänner*, October 1874 – June, 1875
- The Covenant as a movement is thus rooted in the witness of Scripture to Christ and its own emerging history as part of Christ’s body.

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 Centrality of the Word of God

- The Evangelical Covenant Church is a community of people which ‘believes in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.’”
- What this means is:
 - * We are a people of a Book;
 - * We believe the Bible stands in judgment of our sinfulness; &
 - * A spiritually healthy Christian community must be sustained by a right use of the Bible, i.e., believing its good news and living in obedience to its demands.

Covenant Committee on Freedom and Theology (1963)

Background in Pietism

- “When Phillipp Jakob Spener laid down his famous proposals for the renewal of the Church in 1675, his first concern was with the centrality of the word of God in the life of the congregation...
- “For many in Spener’s day, the word of God was simply information, or law, or rules; for Spener the word was *power*—power to effect change in the life of the hearer through the Holy Spirit”

The Early “Collegia Pietatis”

- “In August, 1670 ... a small group of devout men approached Spener [their pastor] requesting the creation of an opportunity in which ‘pious minds might occasionally come together ... to confer with one another in simplicity and love; in order that they might find in such conversation among themselves, what they elsewhere among others had sought in vain.’”

K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener, Pietist Patriarch*, pp. 85-86

Later Covenant Conventicles

- Even before the forming of the Covenant as we know it in 1885, Pietists in Scandinavia were following in that tradition.
- Those who were to become Covenanters in America did not feel that they were being fed by what they were receiving in the Augustana churches familiar to them.
- Somehow being schooled in the Faith, i.e., in creedal statements about God and Christ, about Word and Spirit, they were not being led to the experience of it personally.

Early Covenant “Readers”

- “The ‘readers’ did not come to the Bible because they had been convinced by theological and dogmatic discussions of its inerrancy or infallibility. They came, and continue to come, because they found life and inspiration for themselves.
- They knew that speaking about food could not satisfy hunger and speaking about thirst could not quench thirst. They trusted the Bible to be its own defense as well as their own, not by speaking about it, but by proclaiming its message in testimony and sermon, song, and living.”

Late Contemporary “Reader”

- “The more I read the Bible and put faith and trust in it, the more it reveals itself to me to be true.... I do not wave the Bible, I press it to my heart. It is my time table, my lamp shining in a dark room ... my travel guide.
- “I trust it implicitly and I am never let down. I find that ‘all the sages said is in the book my mother read.’ And I have no greater desire in all the world than that others shall find such treasures in the Bible as I find every day of my life.”

How Then Shall We Read?

- “Our way into the Bible is to read, to understand, and to believe. It is possible to read but not understand. It is possible to understand and yet reject in unbelief. But to believe in the Bible is not the same as to believe in God. It is possible to believe the Bible *instead* of believing in God. The worse way to lose the Bible is to make it into an idol....

The Role of the Spirit

- “The Bible is God’s book, but it must in a special sense be Christ’s book. The Bible’s meaning and unity is Christ. But the Holy Spirit needs to witness to Christ in our hearts. Hence to keep the Bible means at the deepest level that it becomes God’s Word about Christ made fruitful through the Holy Spirit.”

David Nyvall, “Let Us Keep Our Bible,”
quoted in K. Olsson, *One Body ...by the Cross* –Volume One (1985)

What Is Inspiration?

- “It is the Spirit of God taking possession of an upright and devout soul who listens for the voice of God, using him and all his mental faculties as his messenger. The writers of the Scriptures are not like water pipes taking water from a distance to bring it a long way and deposit it for you without you taking the trouble to dig for it, or to go and get it.
- Writers of the Bible are more like the mountainside, saturated with water which pours from its side in springs for everyone to come and drink. The Bible writers were saturated with Divine truth; then out of that saturation the truth sprang forth into utterance. That is inspiration.”

Hjalmar Sundquist, *The Credentials of Jesus* (1930)

'No Neutral Science'

- “The Bible is no apothecary shop with all kinds of medicines but it is my prescription. It does not contain truths simply to be observed but truth to be obeyed. The biggest misuse of the Bible is to make its contents a neutral science.
- “The Bible is a partisan book. It enjoins me to choose, to take a position for or against. And it is hardly possible to insult this book more than by putting a muzzle on its claims and its demands.

David Nyvall, “Abide in the Word” (*Glad Hearts*, p. 313)

Life Oriented and Communal

- 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...

Scripture, Spirit, and Church

- One cannot read the Scripture, much less interpret and apply it correctly, entirely by oneself. Though there is a legitimate place for personal reading and devotion, such exercises are never entirely private. Their purpose is simply to further resource and measure oneself by the Word in order better to build up Christ's body and advance his Kingdom. All understandings thus gained should be shared and refined in conversation and prayer with other members of Christ's body.

Remember? Covenanting Together

- In thus being engaged, every believer affirms what has been central in Covenant understanding from the beginning: “I am a companion of all those who fear you and keep your precepts” (Psalm 119:63).
- God’s Word is ageless. It is also, by its own confession, “every morning new” for those who read it, seek to absorb it together through God’s Spirit over time, and thus come both to receive its message of grace and live into it.

Timeless and Timely

- Let August Pohl (1845-1913), an early Covenant pastor, both challenge and encourage us all:
- “If you are sitting there dead in sin and shame, dear one, sit then where it rains.... It is always raining in God’s Word. Sit there, and you will soon be drenched through and through.”

Sermon in *Mission-Vänner*, September, 1878

Next Week's Assignment

Read Prep Sheet
for

The Necessity of New Birth
and

frame a written response
to the

Discussion Questions

Closing Prayer – Psalm 131

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,

My eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things

too great and marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,

Like a weaned child with its mother;

My soul is like a weaned child that is with me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord

From this time forth and forevermore.