

Covenant Hope Fellowship Membership Covenant

The Covenant Hope Fellowship membership covenant was created out of a desire to inform and equip members of CHF as to their responsibilities to the church and to enhance their experience of fulfillment and joy that comes from following Christ as Lord in a local body of believers. The primary purpose of this covenant is to serve as a teaching document with three functions:

- 1) To clarify the biblical obligations and expectations for the individual members of Covenant Hope Fellowship.
- 2) To serve as a template for teaching and a reference regarding doctrinal beliefs of Covenant Hope Fellowship for current and prospective members.
- 3) To serve as a tool for reflection and growth toward holiness. This document seeks to highlight key biblical texts as they relate to Christian discipleship and church membership in hopes that Covenant Hope Fellowship and its individual members would grow in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

What Is The Church? Those who trust in and follow Jesus are involved in something much bigger than ourselves. We have graciously been invited into God's redemptive purposes in the world. Since the beginning, God has been creating and calling forth His people for the display of His glory in a grand narrative of redemption and reconciliation. Though creation now suffers the curse of Genesis 3, the gospel is the means by which the world is being made right. The gospel also carries with it the promise of ultimate renewal, a restoration even more glorious than Eden, and thus believers eagerly anticipate the return of Christ.

The Church universal (i.e., all believers, everywhere) is the means by which God is fulfilling His purposes in the world (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). The Church universal is being used to write God's beautiful and dramatic story of redemption and reconciliation. In light of this reality, the

opportunity to join a local church body (i.e., a particular group of believers in a particular locale) is much more than a commitment to consistent attendance or active involvement in small groups. It is also a sacred call to be involved in the redemptive work of our sovereign God to push back the darkness of a fallen world through the power of the Holy Spirit with the light of His Son, Jesus Christ. The church is the gathering of the redeemed, the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2, 9) and the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of many members within the same body. Just as a human body relies upon mutual dependence of individual members for proper functioning, so the body of Christ requires sacrificial and responsible service by its individual members. The Bible speaks of this in 1 Corinthians.

12:21- *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’”* (1 Corinthians 12:21). Likewise, a member of the church cannot say to another member that he or she is unnecessary. We all have gifts that differ according to the gracious provision of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:3-8). Contrary to the beliefs of our culture, we need each other.

Membership at Covenant Hope is participation in a family, a microcosm of the universal household of God. All members are united to Christ and thus to each other. Unity within the church is expressed in love for God and a love for others, both those within the family and those who are not. Because of the identification of Christ with His church, Christians are expected to display His gospel in a manner that is worthy of Him (Ephesians 4:1).

What Is a Covenant and Why Have One for Church Membership?

A covenant is generally defined as a formal and serious agreement or promise. In light of the description of the church above, membership within the church should be a serious commitment. Far too often today, being a part of a local church is viewed from the perspective of consumerism. This means that many people are part of a church merely on the basis of what it can do for them. When the church no longer suits their wishes, they flippantly find another church. This is not the biblical picture of membership within the body.

Within the Scripture, there are a number of examples of covenants, some between God and man (Genesis 6, 9, 15; Ezekiel 20; Hosea 2; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 26), while others are solely between men (1 Samuel 18, 2 Samuel 5). In some covenants, one party binds his or herself to fulfill the obligations of both sides of the agreement. In others, the parties are reciprocally bound to adhere to the obligations. While God's covenant with the Church universal is an example of the former, the local church covenant represents the latter. All members of Covenant Hope Fellowship are expected to read and abide by the content of this covenant. If at any time one of the parties of this church covenant continues in a state of unfaithfulness to its provisions, the other is released from certain obligations. In addition, it is understood that certain circumstances may provide sufficient and righteous grounds to transfer membership elsewhere.

While focusing primarily on the responsibilities between the individual parties, the corporate church body, her leaders and her individual members, this covenant is first and foremost an acknowledgement of general Christian obligations and an agreement to enter into those duties for God's glory and the good of the church body. (Portions of this document up to this point have been adapted from the membership covenant of the Village Church, Flower Mound, TX)

Some have questioned the wisdom of a church covenant on practical, denominational, and even biblical grounds citing James 5:12- *"But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."* This text, it has been argued, teaches that covenanting with a church, even with pure motives, puts a person under condemnation later when they fall short of their promises- as practically every person will.

Yet, the purpose of the covenant is not to "police" people in terms of morality, serve as the justification for a "witch hunt," or create an atmosphere of condemnation. The opposite is true. When members believe, behave, and serve as Christians should, an atmosphere of loving and encouraging accountability will be generated. This is the purpose of the covenant.

Biblical Obligations of Members to the Covenant Hope Fellowship Body

As those who have experienced the grace of a life changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to reflect the character of Christ through the pursuit of certain attitudes and actions and the rejection of others. The Scripture refer to this reality as “*living according to the Spirit*” (Romans 8:1-8). The requirements of this membership covenant are in no way intended as an addition to the biblical obligations of a believer. Rather, this document functions primarily as an accessible, yet non-exhaustive explanation of what the Scripture teaches about the obedience that faith produces.

As a Member, I Covenant...

- 1) To submit to the authority of the Scripture as the final arbiter on all issues (Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21) and to affirm CHF’s statement of essential beliefs.

- 2) To pursue the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and the practice of spiritual disciplines (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 5:1-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22).

- 3) To follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - By being baptized by immersion after my conversion.

 - By regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through the observance of the Lord’s Supper.

- 4) To regularly participate in the life of Covenant Hope Fellowship by attending weekly services, engaging in gospel-centered small groups, and serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23- 25; Titus 3:14).

- 5) To steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

- 6) By God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13-16, 4:1-3). Believers should strive to put certain attitudes and actions to death while stirring and stimulating love and good deeds through the Spirit. Below are a few examples of actions addressed in the Scriptures:
 - I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, premarital sex and pornography (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 10:8; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4).
 - I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at Covenant Hope Fellowship before pursuing divorce from my spouse (Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; for the role of the church in the process of divorce, see Paul's concern for the resolution of legal matters within the assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 6).
 - I will refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness, gossip and other sinful behavior as the Bible dictates (Romans 1:28-32, 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; James 3:3-18).

- 7) To take seriously the responsibility of Christian freedom, especially actions or situations that could present a stumbling block to another (1 Corinthians 8:1-13). See *CHF's statement on "Non-Essential Beliefs."*

- 8) To submit to the discipline of God through His Holy Spirit by:
 - Following the biblical procedures for church discipline where

sin is evident in another– the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration.

- Receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers (Psalm 141:5; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Hebrews 12:5-11).

9) To do the following when I sin:

- Confess my sin to God and to fellow believers.
- Repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; James 5:16; 1 John 1:6-10).

10) To support the leadership of the church as well as its vision/mission and to diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5).

11) To do the following should I leave the church for righteous reasons:

- To notify a staff member.
- To seek another church with which I can carry out my biblical responsibilities as a believer.