

COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS

GROUP STUDY PART 1

Introduction

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to “provide an understanding of the context for the affirmation of our living faith for people both within and outside of our fellowship.”¹

WHY DO WE AFFIRM?

First we will see why our Fellowship is **not** anchored on doctrines, creeds or oaths.

We will start with Oaths.

DEFINITION: An oath is a solemn, usually formal, calling upon God to witness to the truth of what one says. (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary)

An oath is a serious undertaking which virtually means taking the Lord’s name in a vow. Breaking an oath carries dire consequences and removes the one taking the oath from GRACE and places them under LAW.

From scripture:

Leviticus 19:12

“do not **swear** falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD”²

Zechariah 5:3

He asked me “What do you see”. I answered, “I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.” And he said to me, “This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The LORD Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in that house and destroy it completely, both its timbers and its stones.’”²

Matthew 5:34

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made. But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.’²

So, shall we stay in GRACE or live under LAW.

What about CREEDS?

DEFINITION: A creed is a brief authoritative formula of religious belief. (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary)

Creeds are useful tools for training and instruction. One must use caution when adopting or following a creed that is more of a commentary of another person’s interpretation of scripture. We of the Evangelical Covenant Church do accept the Apostles Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as concise statements of biblical faith. But these creeds are not definitive enough to define our fellowship with respect to the reformation of the Church and the Pietist movement that forms the core of our beliefs.

¹ COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS - COVENANT PUBLICATIONS

² NIV

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Doctrine?

DEFINITION: A principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

A faith doctrine is a living, growing ever maturing entity that is personal between you and the Holy Spirit. As Christians we believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. At the time of our baptism the Holy Spirit did not dump all the wisdom of the scriptures upon us. No, we gained wisdom at a level and rate we could understand and put into practice. A true Christian's faith doctrine is at any point in time **true**, proven by understanding of scripture for that person, at that time, in their spiritual walk. So for now can we say—a new recipient of the baptism of the Holy Spirit will have a faith doctrine which may be much different from the 40 year veteran of the walk in Grace. I might add that blindly accepting the doctrine of someone else when it goes against your own Spirit driven conscience (doctrine) opposes your freedom in Christ Jesus. Once again moving you away from grace toward law.

Covenant Affirmations:

DEFINITION: An affirmation is a solemn declaration made under the penalties of perjury by a person who conscientiously declines taking an oath. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

In view of this definition along with scriptural guidance and Church tradition concerning oaths, creeds and doctrine the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) adopted the principals of affirmations as the faith statements for the fellowship. This took place in 1976 at the ECC Annual Meeting and was ratified by the membership. Prior to this time (that is from 1885 to 1976) congregational guidance was primarily from "Spener's³ '*Pia Desideria*' and what ever by-laws each congregation agree upon and elected. In 2005 the ECC Annual Meeting added one affirmation to reflect a commitment to the mission of the Church.⁴

"The EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH seeks to form and nurture communities that are deeply committed to Jesus Christ and passionately engage in Christ's mission in the world. The purpose of Covenant Affirmations is to make clear the values and principles that have guided the Evangelical Covenant Church since its founding in 1885".⁵

"**Our**" Affirmations are ten short, simple statements divided into two groups. The first four are called the COMMON CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATIONS. For the sake of understanding we will refer to these four as the *Affirmations of the Body Whole*. The second group of six statements is the CENTRAL COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS which we will refer to as the *Affirmations of the body members*. These ten statements define the **nonnegotiable** context of our living faith, for those within and outside of our fellowship.

³ (Spener was a renowned Pietist 1635-1705. For information on Spener's *Pia Desideria* go to http://www.rts.edu/Site/Virtual/Resources/Student_Theses/Ptak-Speners_Proposals.pdf

⁴ For a deeper understanding of the history of the ECC read 'One Body...Many Members' *The Covenant Church in Historical Perspective* a Covenant Publications booklet available on line.

⁵ 'Covenant Affirmations' Covenant Publications.

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GROUP STUDY PART 2

THE AFFIRMATIONS

Now that I understand why we have AFFIRMATIONS, what do they state? What promise am I giving to the fellowship when I become a part of the fellowship?

The affirmations are separated into two parts.

A, The “COMMON CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATIONS” or, of the body whole.

B, The “CENTRAL COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS” or, of the body members.

In the purpose of the booklet or for that matter this study group, the key statement is; “Such a statement is not to be construed as a creed or a formal doctrinal statement.”

COMMON CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATIONS

We are an apostolic church.

Write a simple one sentence statement that defines an apostolic church.

We are a catholic church

By definition the word catholic as we use it is a Late Latin term for *universal*. Late Latin is a written form of Latin used in the period from the 3rd to the 6th century AD. Writers from the 3rd to 6th century used the term to define all apostolic churches that believed in and confessed faith in Christ Jesus as their redeemer, savior. The reformation Catholic churches all hold true as a basic statement of faith, the Apostle’s, Nicene, Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds.

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We are a Reformation church.

Driven by Martin Luther and molded by the Pietism movement the Evangelical Covenant Church is firmly rooted in the reformation church.

Justified by faith alone.

The bible is the sovereign word of God and final in all matters of faith.

All believers are members of the Priesthood of Christ.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It is a true, unearned gift.

Sanctification is through the Holy Spirit..

We are an evangelical church.

The bible as absolute authority and spiritual rebirth are also stated in the previous affirmations. New here is the duties of taking Christ to the world, biblical education of all members of the Body of Christ, benevolence and social justice.

Evangelism is a commission directed by Christ.

What does it mean?

Does it mean to get them saved? _____.

Does it mean to get them to join the Church? _____.

It does mean that we are charged to

_____.

Does this mean that we all have to sign up to go to Africa, Indonesia or the Philippines? _____.

How do we fulfill the need for Christian based educational systems open to all members of the Body.

Teaching from the pulpit.

Church sponsored seminars and topic studies.

Small group bible studies.

Retreats.

Benevolence. _____

Social justice. _____

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CENTRAL COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS. (or, of the body members)

In 1976 five statements were affirmed to define the Central Covenant Affirmations. Then in 2005 one more statement was added to promote unity in thought and action among all the congregations of the ECC.

They are:

The centrality of the word of God.

The necessity of the new Birth.

A commitment to the whole mission of the Church.

The Church as a fellowship of believers.

A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The reality of freedom in Christ.

The centrality of the word of God.

The bible is the word of God. It is the first and last word and only perfect rule to guide the conduct of the Body of Christ—the Church.

Spener was a very early promoter of small group studies conducted and led by lay members.

Small group studies, learning, exploring and applying the Word of God have been an integral part of the Covenant Church since its founding.

The Word comes to us by the Holy Spirit.

The scriptures should shape our lives and community.

We cannot stand alone.

GROUP STUDY PART 2 THE AFFIRMATIONS

The necessity of the new birth.

In our natural state we are _____ to the world and _____ to the Lord. Our goal as Christians is to be _____ to the world and _____ to the Lord.

Biblically speaking what is meant by dead to the Lord or spiritual death.

New birth or spiritual rebirth is our connection, attachment and more important acceptance by God.

In Genesis 2:17 “...you will surely die.” It is true that Adam’s physical body did die. But the major inference is not the physical death. It is the separation from God, being cast out from fellowship with God.

In John 3:1-21 Jesus explains that we are first born of water, natural birth, but we must be born of the Spirit, born again, in order to see the kingdom of God.

Conversion is the act of turning from _____ to _____ by virtue of faith and repentance.

When were you converted? _____

Does your life reflect your conversion?

Do you consciously try to reflect conversion in your life?

It is God’s desire that all mankind be saved. But the ECC accepts God’s work that only those who convert to Jesus Christ shall be saved.

Christian maturity as a product of your new birth is a lifelong process. No one should expect perfection in this life. No one can experience the fullness of conversion alone. It requires living in the Word, in fellowship, within the Body of Christ.

GROUP STUDY PART 2 THE AFFIRMATIONS

A commitment to the whole mission of the Church

This affirmation was added in 2002 to bring unity and definition to the fellowship of congregations within the ECC. It simply defines that all congregations honor the mission statement of the ECC and in turn every member of the fellowship honors the mission of the congregation.

The Church as a fellowship of believers.

Two basic guidelines for inclusion in membership.

The Church is a fellowship of believers.

Members must agree with all the Affirmations.

Equality regardless of race, class or gender.

A conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is at work in every individual that has accepted Christ Jesus as the redeemer and savior.

The Holy Spirit is the Councilor sent by God to make known his desires for all mankind.

Although we constantly walk in temptation, as Christians we also walk in the Spirit. If we consciously seek the Spirit He will, over time mold our conscience.

Our goal is to be able to affirm Paul's statement "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

The Holy Spirit is at work promoting Fellowship among believers.

It is the Holy Spirit that has brought you to this fellowship.

It is the Holy Spirit that produces that feeling of peace when we are in fellowship.

It is the Holy Spirit that produces that empty feeling in Christians as well as non-believers when they are not in fellowship with God.

Reinforced by the Reformation ideals, Covenanters abide in the knowledge that the word (that is scripture) and the Spirit are congruent and inseparable.

The Holy Spirit bestows gifts on believers, not for the benefit of that believer but for the benefit of others.

It is God's plan that gifts strengthen believers and that an amalgamation of believers' gifts makes a fellowship strong and powerful.

In fellowship we each aid the others in discernment of our gifts.

A spiritual gift cannot be learned or taught, it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit.

In fellowship we aid each other in putting our Spirit given gifts into practice.

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The reality of freedom in Christ.

“The Covenant Church seeks to focus on what unites followers of Jesus Christ rather than what separates them. The center of our commitment is a clear faith in Jesus Christ. The centrality of the word of God, the necessity of the new birth, a commitment to the whole mission of the church, the church as a fellowship of believers, and a conscious dependence of the Holy Spirit form the parameters in which freedom is experienced. Here followers of Christ find the security to offer freedom to one another on issues that might otherwise divide.”

So if someone in the fellowship holds a belief that does not conflict with the proceeding 5 affirmations WE MUST allow them that freedom.

Examples:

Spiritual freedom _____ and _____ as we walk in the word.

What does it mean to walk in the word?

Can you walk in the word alone? Read paragraph 2 and 3. If appropriate ask a member of the group to read.

What does it mean to “continue in my word”?

Does this mean reading the Bible every day?

Liberation in the Old Testament establishes a theme of freedom to _____ and _____. Is that theme different in the New Testament? _____

In the Old Testament the process was by _____.

In the New Testament the process is by _____.

GROUP STUDY PART 2 THE AFFIRMATIONS

Summary of paragraphs 4 and 5.

By virtue of Christ's death and resurrection Jesus has opened a new realm of light, life and joy. By Grace we are free, subject to none but servant to all. How can you be subject to none, yet a servant to all?

The ECC offers theological and personal freedom where those freedoms _____ conflict with biblical and historical record. Strong doctrine verses affirmations.

IN CONCLUSION:

The Covenant Church cherishes this freedom in Christ and recognizes, as one of our forebears put it, that freedom is a gift and the last of all gifts to mature. In the meantime there will be questions and conflicts. -----

----- Full maturity and full understanding await the day when "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, when he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). In the meantime we offer freedom to one another, since for Covenant people freedom is not something we claim for ourselves, but offer to the other. In this we are simply sharing the gift of freedom God has given us in Jesus Christ