

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
2080 West Grand Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan 48208
Nathan Johnson, D.D., Senior Pastor

Lesson 17: “Commend Our Holy Faith”

Scripture: Acts 20:28-38; 2 Corinthians 5

Goal: To embrace and fulfill our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To strive to live in a manner that reveals our holy faith and our purity of heart.

Covenant Segment:

“...endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.”

Overview

God’s will is that believers be ambassadors for Christ. How can we help people draw nearer to God through the testimony of a life of faith? Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to “*follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*” (*1 Corinthians 11: 1*). Can you imagine a person so determined and committed to living life God’s way, that he could boldly tell someone to follow his example? Indeed, commending our faith to others means living in such a way that others would want to appropriate (*take hold of and desire*) a relationship with God. Only lives that have the power to demonstrate a viable connection to the Spirit of God would compel someone to do so. The Church covenant names two things that are necessary to the action of commending our faith: purity of heart (our inner life) and good will towards men (our outward actions). This part of the church covenant brings to bear two pertinent questions. How do we influence others to want to become Christians? How can we conduct ourselves so that others want to be like us? The focus is on living in such a manner or placing our faith so near to others that they would strongly desire Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (New King James Version, NKJ)

Focus Statement

- 1. The Covenant exhorts us to be pure of heart, honest and forthright as prerequisites in exemplifying the holy faith.¹ To be pure in heart means that our motives and intentions are genuine flowing out of a spirit of righteousness. Purity of heart is a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.**

I Samuel 16: 7b states: “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Oh, how important is the character of our hearts to God, and yet scripture tells us that the heart of man is desperately wicked. Proverbs 4: 23 teach us to be diligent about our hearts because out it flow the issues of life. As human beings, we make most of life’s decisions through the filter of an unreliable, untrustworthy heart. So why does the Church covenant lay emphasis on purity of heart? Here we see the mystery and power of a heart regenerated by the grace of God. Hearts yielded to God are kept, directed, and transformed by His Holy Spirit. The key lies in the fact that we exemplify our faith, when we apply the Word of God to our hearts, lives, and minds on a daily basis. A fresh application of the Word of God requires that we be responsive and responsible enough to listen to God’s evaluation of our lives, which is provided through His Word. Consider the life of King David, who was a man after God’s own heart, but by no means was a perfect man; he was, however, a man that was responsive to God’s evaluation of his life, his actions, and his motives. When others see that we live “by the Book”, we become a witness that speaks volumes about the power of God. In this way, we commend our faith to others. Commending our faith is part of our witness to the world and part of the edifying the body of Christ. Our witness is from “without and within” the church. A key concept in this process is to remember that we are not exemplifying and commending ourselves but we are representing the power of a living and resurrected Christ who can transform us to the glory of God!

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. (NKJ)

Focus Statement

- 2. The Church covenant points to a second factor—good will towards men (our actions towards others) makes the commendation of our faith complete. Having purity of heart alone is not enough to compel others to want to seek a saving relationship with Christ. James 1:22 tells us to be “doers of the Word, and not hearers only.” Indeed, faith without works is dead!**

Ministry provides an opportunity to demonstrate acts of love and concern for the needs of others and to utilize the Word of God to communicate and share God’s truth. Our covenant specifies that our endeavor should be towards all men;

¹ Turner, William C. (2002). A Journey through the Church Covenant. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

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regardless of race, creed, color, gender, or age. We promise so much in the name of the Lord: salvation, fullness of joy, care for the lost, comfort for those who mourn, food for the hungry, clothes for the naked.² Thank God, the means to fulfill these promises are not incumbent upon us. They come from our God who is trustworthy and able to follow through. It is our job though to point others to Christ and to reflect Him in our living.

How effective are we in our demonstration to others that we are Christians? If we are honest, we will recognize that the modern church is negligent in this area. In fact, many times the world accurately points out the incongruence between our actions and the faith we purport. How is it that there is such a disconnection between the heart of faith and our actions? We are encouraged every Sunday to take advantage of ministry opportunities. Jesus tells us that *“the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few, pray that the Lord will send the laborers in the vineyard”* (Matt.9: 37). Again, we must acknowledge our utter dependence on God for the power to connect our hearts and hands so that they exemplify a vibrant faith in God. We provide the volition—our willingness to yield; God provides the power! Does our behavior towards others reflect Christ? *“Our righteous deeds illuminate the path to God by reflecting His power and grace to others. This brings Him glory and proves your faith is genuine.”*³

How well are we able to relate Scripture in relation to questions others ask, situations they encounter, or difficulties they face? If we are to relate to others the truth of our faith, we must have knowledge of God. That knowledge can only be developed through a diligent study of God’s Word. Do you find yourself assembled with other believers to study the Word of God each week? How might your personal time of prayer and study of God’s Word enhance your ability to impart God’s truth to others? All believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit as the personal power for living a life that pleases God (Rom. 8:9-11, I Cor.6: 19-20, Ephesians 1: 18- 20). The important thing is to desire to commend our holy faith to others and the Holy Spirit will enable us to do it.

Matthew 5:16 (*NKJ*)

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Is your knowledge of God’s Living Word sufficient enough to draw others to Christ?
2. How is it possible to commend the faith even though we are flawed human beings?⁴

² Turner, William C. (2002). **A Journey through the Church Covenant.** Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. 90

³ MacArthur, John, (1993) **Drawing Near, June 27 Exposing Dead Faith,** Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Book

⁴ Ibid.

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Where we are in the Church Covenant... *

HAVING BEEN LED, AS WE BELIEVE, BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to give it a place in our affections, prayers, and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to study diligently the word of God; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be kind and just to those in our employ, and faithful in the service we promise others; ***endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.***

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and through life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

Each month we will include a copy of the Church Covenant and highlight the current lesson. It is our hope that this will give the larger context for the passage being studied.