

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
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Detroit, Michigan 48208
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Lesson 1

An Introduction to the Study of the Church Covenant

GOAL:

To provide background information on the Church Covenant for the purpose of understanding our commitment to discipleship and how it impacts our Spiritual growth.

OBJECTIVE:

To increase our levels of understanding and application of our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Introduction: *What is our Church Covenant?*

The Church Covenant we recite each first Sunday is a public declaration of some very powerful beliefs about our commitment to our relationship with God and the people of God. This covenant only becomes truth when we allow it to live through us. It becomes a living covenant when it defines our intention, warrants our continuous attention, and determines our actions. Join us in exploring a deeper meaning of the Church Covenant!

People, who have a covenant relationship with the Living God, have a mutual story to tell. Can we share that story if we don't know it? Our journey through the Church Covenant gives us an opportunity to individually and corporately discover who we are and what we have in Christ Jesus. These deep truths about our God, our relationship with Him, and each other ought to be the driving force that shapes our decisions and actions. Certainly, it is our relationship with Christ that determines our eternal destination!

When we take the time in the service to corporately recite the Church Covenant, what are we conveying to each other? Is it just a perfunctory exercise devoid of significance? Or does it express a peculiar uniqueness? All of these questions point to our identity—the essence of who we are as believers. Identity—what is so powerful about identity? Well, we find that our identity defines who we are, what we stand for, and what we believe and hope for. It is the seat of our deepest beliefs and assumptions about us and our lives. It is our very core. One writer states that identity answers two questions. *“About what do we care? And how much do we dare?”*¹

What happens to people who allow others to determine their identity? As an African American people, we have a history that is replete with examples of the dehumanizing effect of letting someone other than God dictate our identity. The African American National Anthems records our struggle against a societal evil that devalued and

diminished us. It is the story of a people whose faith in God preserved them in the midst of persecution. It tells of a God that comforted them in a time of deepest sorrow and grief. It portrays a God whose hand was a constant guide amid utter chaos. Its overriding theme is one of hope and triumph through saving grace! It is a praise testimony of the sovereign power of the Living God.

*Lift every voice and sing, till earth and Heaven ring.
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies.
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song, full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song, full of the faith that the present has brought us.
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.*

*Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet.
Come to a place for which our fathers sighed.
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last.
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

*God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, let us into the light
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee.
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world we forget thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand?
True to our God, true to our native land.*

What can we learn together from our study through the Church Covenant? What truths can we uncover? We can find answers to some of the following questions:

- Who are we in Christ Jesus?
- How does our relationship with Christ place us into a covenant relationship with each other?
- How should this covenant shape our attitudes, behaviors and actions?
- How does it shape our interactions with each other?
- When we enter into covenant together what obligations do we have as stewards of the church?
- What ought to be the witness of a covenant people to the world?

“A church covenant is a declaration or pledge made to GOD, the church body and one’s self. It is based upon the congregation’s faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is a commitment of how we agree to live as fellow Christians and how God expects us to live. The church covenant is based on the scriptures of the Bible and we know that all scripture is God breathed (*2 Timothy 3:16*). The Holy Spirit is the source that empowers the church to be obedient to the covenant. The Holy Spirit is also

essential for life in the church. As believers of the covenant we are responsible and held accountable to live according to God's Word. We are to encourage fellow Christians to live holy and righteous lives (*1 Timothy 5: 11*). It is also our responsibility to correct or admonish our brothers and sisters who remain in sin (*Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5*). The covenant people of the church should consist of believers who have been transformed and renewed through the Holy Spirit (*Romans 12:2*). This represents the body of believers who have been truly born again."² Our journey begins...

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1. Garmston, R. & Wellman, and B., (1992): *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon Publishers.
 2. Schmucker, M. *Membership Matters—What is our Church Covenant?*