

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

Lesson 5: We Solemnly and Joyfully Enter into Covenant

Scripture: Psalm 100:3

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

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

Objective: To understand why our entering into covenant with each other in the presence of God is both an occasion of solemnity and joy.

INTRODUCTION:

During the past six months, our church family has studied and been introduced to four lessons about the meaning of our church covenant. In our first few lessons, we discovered that we were chosen by God, consecrated (set apart) to live holy and righteous lives as we served and glorified Him. We learned that this ‘peculiar’ status as God’s people was because we shared the blessing of being led by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. It is because we have received this gift of faith that we’ve been joined together as a genuine community of believers and empowered to walk with Christ and each other. In addition, the Holy Spirit has begun the sanctification process—making us holy individually and corporately.

We publicly acknowledge and profess our faith in Jesus through the ordinance of Baptism. Through this sacred ceremony, we declare that we identify with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. We are proclaiming that we no longer belong to the world or ourselves, but to God! Because we are children of the living God, we embrace his intention for us—to live under the control of the Holy Spirit.

We have also come to understand that Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost reveals just how precious a gift we have been given. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, we declare that our relationship is with the one true, sovereign and Holy God—the Creator of all that exists. This relationship with our heavenly Father defines the very purpose for our existence—to glorify Him with all that we are. In being baptized in the name of Jesus, we acknowledge the depth of the Father’s love for us in that He gave his only begotten Son, Jesus to redeem us through His death, his burial and resurrection. Jesus broke sin’s deathly grip and rescued us from its penalty—eternal death. Furthermore, our baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit represents God’s ability to keep us until we grow into full actualization of our relationship to the Father. God’s gift of salvation is one that is complete—lacking nothing. And so our covenant states: ***We do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one***

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Journey Through the Church Covenant

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body in Christ. Why is entering into this covenant both an occasion of solemnity and joy?

WE JOYFULLY ENTER INTO COVENANT

We gather in God's presence to celebrate his unconditional love and receive His tender mercies that are renewed everyday. We stand in awe of his sovereign power knowing that He is supreme, Holy and His glory lasts forever and ever. As we sincerely praise and worship God, we strengthen the church family and bring glory to God which is our ultimate purpose. We can experience joy by trusting and obeying God. As the community of believers it is the joy of knowing that we have been united with Christ through the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. Even when we arrive to Sunday worship burdened, persecuted and bruised by the world, we *'count it all joy'* because our faith is being perfected [James 1:2]. Joy is the gift we receive from praising and worshiping Him. *"For the joy of the Lord is our strength."* [Neh. 8:1].

Experiencing worship with an assembly of believers deepens our commitment to God. All of God's creation gives Him praise! Our worship experience is the moment in time in which we join with God's angels in their unending praise to Him in the heavenly realm. We ask God to manifest His divine presence and fill His sanctuary, that we might be blessed as He inhabits our worship and praise. We draw nearer to God as He nurtures and continues to fill an emptiness we once had, and sustains us on our journey as we join in glorifying Him in the highest! And so we enter into the moment of worship by declaring:

*"We're here because we believe in the unseen presence of God. We believe that although we can't see Him physically with our eyes, the Lord of the universe is in this place this morning. And our souls will be nourished as we once again gain the perspective that comes from His presence. Join with us to worship our Creator and Sustainer, the Ancient of Days."*¹

WE SOLEMNLY ENTER INTO COVENANT

A clearer understanding of our Church Covenant inspires a conscious decision to submit ourselves to live in and through Christ. The solemnity of this decision is nurtured by the presence of a Holy God. For to live in Christ IS to live a life of holiness. We are the handy work of God and come seeking a renewed assurance of His intentions for us as He manifests His presence. We come grateful for the bountiful ways that He has sustained us and called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. As we reflect on His transforming work, cherish His goodness and mercy, we are amazed by His grace. His Son's death for our salvation demonstrates His unconditional love and the price that was for paid us. *"For you were bought at a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your Spirit which are God's."* (I Cor. 6:20) Our Church Covenant is a solemn

¹ Pastor Nathan Johnson, D.D., (2007). *The Entrance Moment Begins the Worship.* The Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church Bulletin.

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commitment to God, each other, and personal and corporate holiness. We anticipate the continued work of the Holy Spirit to transform us and to bring to completion God's divine purpose in us. Therefore, we pray:

“God of infinite tenderness and strong compassion, weave your will into the fabric of our lives. Weave your joy into our songs, your peace into our prayers and justice into our deeds. Let this time of worship be a holy moment where the frayed edges of our lives are woven into a beautiful tapestry that comforts and blesses, inspires and renews. God of infinite tenderness and strong compassion, weave your love into our service of praise. Amen”²

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, ANGELS, AND THIS ASSEMBLY

“A church covenant is a declaration or pledge made to GOD, the church body and one's self. It is based upon our faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We are making a sacred vow before the world, each other, and God.”³ The church is called the bride of Christ. We strive to be without spot or wrinkle and worthy of the Bridegroom—Jesus Christ. Embracing and fulfilling our covenant relationship with God and one another is like marriage, a work in progress; like a garden, our faith and relationship with Christ needs to be nurtured continually so that our love for Him does not wither. The covenant instructs us to walk in love with everyone, no matter what someone does to us, and with practice, we eventually reach the point where the person does not see us, but sees His Holy Spirit in us. Maintaining an attitude of forgiveness transforms our souls into those who can welcome love at every opportunity; our commitment to this covenant is to be faithful, loyal to Christ, and available to everyone in need.

No one enters into a marriage covenant lightly. During the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom give each other a ring as a symbol of their love and commitment to each other. The ring is a perfect circle, uniting all ends as one; we were incomplete beings before God entered our lives; with Him, we have been made complete. We have given ourselves totally over to Christ, and as marriage is considered a one-time arrangement, He gives all of His love to us, eternally. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tells us that *‘two (He and we) are better than one. If we fall, He will lift us; however, if we are alone, there is not one to lift us’* (paraphrased). Our life, as the community of believers, is what we give to Christ as a symbol of our commitment and love. Because we invite God to grant us His presence during the worship service, we are making this commitment before God, the angels and our assembly.

² Pastor Nathan Johnson, D.D., (2007) *The Invocation*. The Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church Bulletin.

³ Schmucker, M. Membership Matters—What is Our Church Covenant?

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Summary:

The Holy Sprit has drawn us and we've made our public profession of the sacrifice our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We were baptized in the Name of the Father, of Son and of Holy Ghost. Now as a community of believers, we enter into a Covenant with God as one body recognizing our responsibility to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). We accept the responsibility to join with other believers and worship as a family as one body in Christ. God views our worship celebration as solemn and joyful. How awesome it is that God finds it important enough to call His angels to witness our worship of Him through the unction of the Holy Spirit. Knowing that all of what we have has been graciously given by God and that He sent His only Son to be a living sacrifice so we can have an intimate relationship with Him explains why our worship is a solemn occasion. Is it any wonder that we respond with joy and the desire to obey and serve God? We are so grateful that despite the trials of the week, God has seen fit to allow us to enter into His house one more time. All glory and honor be to our God!

Questions for Class Dialogue and Study

1. As God and the angels look down and observe us in our worship celebration what do they see? As they listen, what do they hear?
2. What do you think might be God's assessment of the sincerity of our worship as we give our offering each Sunday?
3. In what ways do we give God our best when we celebrate the goodness of God?
4. What does "we solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant" mean to you personally? (Give specific examples of how your faith walk verifies that this statement is true for you.)

CLOSING PRAYER

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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.

**New Feature: 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.*