

Membership Covenant Introduction

Hope Church exists to glorify God in the advance of His Kingdom through our faithfulness to Him.

The Hope Church membership covenant is birthed out of our love for the church body and its individual members whom we hope will experience the fullness of joy which is found in the presence of the Lord. The primary purpose of the church covenant is to serve as a commitment between the members and the elders at Hope Church and to serve as a teaching document with three functions:

- To clarify the biblical obligations and expectations for both the elders of Hope Church and the individual members of the Hope Church body.
- To establish teaching and doctrinal parameters for the Hope Church body.
- To serve as a tool for reflection and growth toward holiness.

Each of these functions is in accordance with the document's overall vision to provide an accessible explanation of the Scriptures in hopes that Hope Church would grow in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

The Membership Covenant Introduction is comprised of a section on the church and the nature of covenants, while the Church Covenant is comprised of the obligations of the Hope Church elders to the Hope Church body and the obligations of individual members to the Hope Church body.

What Is the Church?

The church exists for the display of the glory of God because all things exist for His glory. Those of us who trust in and follow Jesus are caught up 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 (but not less than) a commitment to consistent attendance or active involvement in community. 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. As the Scriptures say, "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 Hope Church 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 which is worthy of Him (Ephesians 4:1; Ephesians 3:10; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:9).

What Is a Covenant?

A covenant is generally defined as “a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.”¹ Within the Scriptures, we find 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.

The covenant of Hope Church contains many conditions that are merely general Christian obligations. For example, all Christians, whether members of Hope Church or elsewhere, are required to submit to the Scriptures, pursue holiness, steward resources, etc. Such requirements are universal obligations for the Christ-follower regardless of any failure on the part of a local church to live up to her covenant obligations.

If at any time an individual member feels as though another member of the church body is not remaining faithful to the requirements of the covenant, it is the responsibility of the individual member to lovingly and humbly express concerns to their fellow member according to the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. If the church and its elders are unwilling to uphold and pursue covenant faithfulness, then the member is freed from his or her membership obligations and encouraged to seek membership elsewhere given the church’s disobedience. In addition, certain circumstances may provide sufficient and righteous grounds to transfer membership elsewhere.

While focusing primarily in language on the responsibilities between the individual parties, the corporate church body, her elders and her individual members, the 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 body and bride of His Son.

¹ Inc Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Includes Index., 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993).

Hope Church Membership Covenant

Biblical Obligations of the Hope Church Elders to the Hope Church Body

As shepherds and overseers of a local church, elders are entrusted with protecting, leading, teaching, equipping and caring for the corporate church body and her individual members. The following is a rather extensive overview of the requirements for elders as spelled out within the Scriptures.

The elders covenant...

- to pray diligently for the church and its members (Acts 6:4).
- to appoint elders and deacons (including staff members who serve in these offices) according to the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures to be approved by the church (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- to prayerfully seek God's will for our church community and steward her resources to the best of our ability based on our study of the Scriptures and following of the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- to care for the church and seek her growth in grace, truth and love (Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 1:28; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:1).
- to equip the members of the church for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- to be on guard against false teachers and teachings (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 1 John 4:1).
- to lovingly oversee church discipline when necessary, for the glory of God, the good of the one disciplined and the health of the church as a whole (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).
- to set an example and join members in fulfilling the obligations of church membership stated below (Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:3).

Biblical Obligations of the Members to the Hope Church 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 Scriptures refer to this reality as "living by the Spirit" (Romans 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 Scriptures teach about the obedience that faith produces, as well as what a member of Hope Church covenants to pursue by the power of the Holy Spirit as a member of this local church body.*

I covenant...

- to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).
- to spend time with the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, and worship (Luke 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 5:1-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22).
- to follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - by being baptized after my conversion (Acts 8:12, 10:47-48).
 - by regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

- to regularly participate in the life of Hope Church by attending weekly services, engaging in gospel-centered home groups and serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25; Titus 3:14).
- to regularly pray for the church, its leaders and its members (Colossians 1:9, 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1).
- to steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts and finances. This includes regular financial giving to Hope Church, 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).
- 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 practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within heterosexual and monogamous marriage. Complete chastity and fidelity means, among other things, that regardless of my marital status, I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, homosexuality, 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; 1 Timothy 1:10).
 - If married, I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at Hope Church with church leadership 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).
- 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).
- 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 5:1-13; Hebrews 12:5-11).
- to do the following when I sin:
 - confess my sin to God and, especially for recurring sins, to fellow believers (James 5:16; 1 John 1:6-10).
 - repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; 1 John 1:6-10).
- to submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5).
- to do the following should I leave the church for righteous reasons:
 - to notify an elder in writing of my intent to transfer my church membership to another church.
 - to seek another gospel-preaching church with which I can carry out my biblical responsibilities as a believer in the spirit of this covenant.