

Sermon Title: **Our Church Covenant – Part 2: Loving One Another**

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Scripture Reference: **John 13:34-35**

Thesis: **Once we established our Church Covenant, the first article addressing the way we relate together was our commitment to love one another as Christ loved us.**

Purpose: **We testify to our commitment to the power of Christ Jesus by the way we love one another.**

Key Word: "Love"

Key Points:

- #1 Covenant is an Expression of God's Nature
- #2 Covenant Making is a Spiritual Practice
- #3 Covenant Fosters Unity

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **John 13:34-35**

A) The Setting:

1) Last week we began a study of our Church Covenant.

- (a) Our Covenant declares that because of the faith we have in God through Jesus
- (b) We profess that faith through our communion with Him and His church by being baptized.
- (c) **This is why we are called a Baptist church;**
 - (i) it is not that we are saved through our baptism,
 - (ii) but that we offered ourselves for Baptism as a means of professing the faith we have put in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

2) And it is because of our FAITH that we have entered into a covenant with Jesus and with the other believers of this church who have likewise professed their faith.

- (a) It is for that reason that last week I said that this is a covenant of FAITH.
- (b) One that we joyfully enter into in agreement with God and His Body in this Church.
- (c) If you were not here for last week's message or remember what we taught, I would encourage you to go to our Church Web page at www.watervillefbc.org and read or reread that message.

3) Our Covenant is more than a statement of what we believe.

- (a) Our covenant protects our community giving us guidelines as to how we are bound together in our Lord.
- (b) **In her book Pursuing God's Will Together, A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups, Ruth Haley Barton asks "Why do we have a covenant?"¹**

"Because a written covenant makes our commitment to each other and God real in a way that mere conversation does not. It provides a way for the group to claim shared ownership for their behavior because it contains detailed guidelines that help the group function together in agreed-upon ways. Without an actual covenant or written agreement, a group may not be clear about what they have agreed on, let alone what it means in the contest of the day-to-day life in leadership community. Something this important cannot be left up to chance or wishful thinking. Spiritual community is so tender and fragile that it requires some protective structures in order for it to survive. Whenever we are tempted to revert to old, unredeemed patterns, our covenant can call us back to our best intentions." (I will refer to several quotes from the same book throughout this message.)

4) Our covenant reminds us of our commitment to God and each other.

- (a) It calls us to work together as we seek to work out God's will for our community.
- (b) It reminds us of our purpose and existence as a community of believers.
- (c) It helps us to resolve differences in a way that is honoring and glorifying to God.

5) Today, we specifically focus our attention on the second paragraph of our Church Covenant.

- (a) It is more than a little interesting to note that once we established our Church Covenant, the first article addressing the way we relate together was our commitment to love one another as Christ loved us.
- (b) This second paragraph of our Covenant testifies to our commitment to the power of Christ Jesus by the way we love one another.
- 6) **The scene for our scripture is towards the end of the Last Supper meal; it is on the Thursday night before Jesus is betrayed.**
 - (a) The disciples don't know it yet, but this is the last time they will be able to spend quality time with Jesus.
 - (b) Jesus is sharing the news that he will be leaving them soon and that they cannot come where He is going.
- 7) **They have been dependent on Jesus for the past three years.**
 - (a) They have seen the miracles and heard His teaching.
 - (b) And now Jesus is sharing some of the most important words of their time together.
- 8) **Instructions that will shape their relationship after Jesus has gone from them.**
 - (a) Some of the disciples had been joking around about who of them was the greatest.
 - (b) What Jesus has to say to them next is found in our scripture reading for today.
- 9) **So, with that introduction, let us turn in our Bibles to John 13:34-35.**

B) Sermon Prayer

C) (The Hook)

- 1) **Jesus is not talking about a Covenant here in this passage.**
 - (a) But He does express an important principle found in a Covenant.
 - (b) That is about how the Body of Christ is to relate to each other.
- 2) **Jesus said to his gathered disciples, "I give you a new commandment."**
 - (a) What does this have to do with our Covenant?
 - (b) It is not an accident that the first article of our Covenant is about how we are to relate to one another in the Body of Christ.
- 3) **Jesus said we are to Love one another.**
 - (a) What Did He mean by that?
 - (b) Perhaps we can learn from the examples Jesus left us in the way He lived His life here on earth.
- 4) **We need to remember that Jesus demonstrated love in dealing with those with sin he encountered when there was a heart of repentance.**
 - (a) In fact when Jesus confronted those with immoral sin and repentance,
 - (b) Jesus was often quick to show His love through His grace and mercy;
 - (c) Rather than condemnation and judgment.
- 5) **Jesus models for us how we are to treat those who are facing difficult life situations.**
 - (a) It is our place to show compassion and the love of Jesus to those who have fallen.
 - (b) But before we get into that we need to understand the connection between covenants and God.

TS: **The first thing we need to know is that a . . .**

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **Covenant is an Expression of God's Nature**

- 1) **A Covenant is an agreement two or more people make with each other about how they will behave in their relationship.²**
 - (a) Some examples would be Marriage vows, ordination to pastoral ministry, the Hippocratic Oath

- (b) These types of relationships contain such potential for good and are so foundational to our well-being that it is worth risking ourselves to them.
- (c) But we also want to establish parameters that will both protect us and help us to succeed in that relationship.
- 2) **We put covenants in place when what is at stake is really important.**
 - (a) We dare not leave the relationship up to chance,
 - (b) Subject to passing whims or confused by misunderstanding.
- 3) **It has been God's pattern to make covenants with individuals on behalf of a group.**³
 - (a) But God's covenants are made with groups who are willing to follow God in intentional ways toward God-ordained vision.
 - (b) Such as God's covenant with Abraham, for example, was done for the purpose of creating a "great nation" through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3)
- 4) Making and keeping covenants is the way God does relationships.

TS: **Secondly, we need to understand that . . .**

B) Key Point #2: Covenant Making is a Spiritual Practice

- 1) **A group's willingness to covenant together around shared values and practices gives definition to its commitment to follow God together.**⁴
 - (a) There is something about entering into a covenant relationship that reflects who God is
 - (b) And forms a more Christlike character within us.
- 2) **Our commitment to a healthy covenant life is not just a commitment to each other; it is a covenant with God Himself to live with each other in the way God has ordained.**⁵
 - (a) Since our God is a convening God, one who brings people together for God's purposes, we are participating in God's nature and character when we covenant with each other.
 - (b) A covenant gives shape and form to our togetherness around a shared purpose.
- 3) **Our commitment to healthy covenant life is grounded in God's love and personal presence;**
 - (a) Through agreed-upon practices we seek to be open and responsive to that presence in and through our relationships with each other.
 - (b) **The Ten Commandments illustrate this dual priority;**
 - (i) The first 4 commandments direct our relationship with God;
 - (ii) The remaining six have to do with our relationship with each other.
- 4) **Our Covenant is, first of all, a covenant with God.**
 - (a) Before God and with the people of God we make certain commitments regarding how we will honor God, ... each other ... and our relationships as brothers and sisters in the family of God.
 - (b) If we break this covenant, we dishonor not only each other but God Himself!
- 5) **This is a very sobering thought.**
 - (a) But it is also life-giving because when we make a covenant before God in relation to each other and seek to be faithful to that covenant, it can become a source of grace.
 - (b) Making and keeping a covenant actually becomes a spiritual practice that opens us to God's transforming presence.

3 Pursuing God's Will Together, Ruth Haley Barton, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2012, Page 155

4 Pursuing God's Will Together, Ruth Haley Barton, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2012, Page 155

5 Pursuing God's Will Together, Ruth Haley Barton, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2012, Page 156

TS: This leads us to our final point in this message in that . . .

C) Key Point #3: Covenant Fosters Unity

- 1) **Romans 12:2** *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (So) Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*
 - (a) We foster a much better chance of determining God's will if we can find unity than on our own.
 - (b) But to do that we must first be transformed by the help of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) **Our covenant reminds us that we need to submit to God, join with His body in work to love one another.**
 - (a) Why is this so important that Jesus is giving this new command during the last hours of His time with His disciples?
 - (b) Because when we can love one another as Christ has loved us we release the power of God.
 - (c) **John 13:35** tells us the reason, *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*
- 3) **A few hours later we have Jesus praying the longest record prayer in John Chapter 17.**
 - (a) This is during the night just before Judas arrives to hand Jesus over to the Religious leaders.
 - (b) This is the real Lord's prayer as John records the words of His concern before facing a terrible death.
 - (c) **The prayer can be broken up into three parts**
 - (i) In the first part Jesus prays for Himself in (verses 1-5)
 - (ii) In the second part, Jesus prays for His disciples (verses 6-19)
 - (iii) And in the last part, Jesus prays for all who will come to believe in Him. (verses 20-26)
- 4) **During this last part of the prayer Jesus prays for the unity of believers, that they will be one as He is one with the Father.**
 - (a) Verse 23 tells us why, *"I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*
 - (b) Jesus is repeating what He told His disciples when He gave them the new commandment.
 - (c) If Jesus was stressing this in his final moments with His disciples we have to believe it was an important principle that He is trying to convey.
- 5) **When we can love one another it is a powerful witness to the power of God's transforming presence in the life of His followers.**
 - (a) It is so unlike the world when we are unified in agreement,
 - (b) So much so that the world can't help but take notice.
- 6) **Under the covenant of the Law which we call the Ten Commandments, the test of love for one's neighbor was one's love for oneself, ("Love your neighbor as yourself").⁶**
 - (a) The test under the new covenant (with the command to love one another) was to love one another as Christ had loved them.
 - (b) **Jesus was demonstrating the kind of love that He had as well as the degree of His love.**
 - (i) His love had brought Him from heaven's glory to this earth.
 - (ii) His love had brought Him from the right hand of the Father to the position of a Servant.
 - (iii) Jesus was asking these men to show the same kind of love.

(iv) His love had made Him a servant, so their love for each other was to make them servants of one another.

7) **In fact, Jesus laid down His life for these men and all who would come to believe in Him.**

(a) **"Greater Love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13**

(b) And in **verse 14** Jesus says, **"You are my friends."**

TS: **What a friend we have in Jesus.**

III) Conclusion (Life Application)

A) In 1 John 4:7-17a, John teaches us about the power of God's love,

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us,"

B) Our Covenant grows out of our commitment to God through His Son, Jesus.

1) By loving one another we show to the world the transforming power of Jesus living through us.

2) Our covenant helps us to build trust in one another and helps us to find God's plan for our community.

IV) Invitation:

A) Do you know Jesus as Lord?

1) Have you asked Him to come into your heart to heal and transform you?

2) Have you made a Covenant with God and this Church to be in this Body of Christ and love as Jesus loved?

3) If not, I encourage you to do it today before you leave; come forward as we sing our closing hymn and let me pray with you.