



Being A Covenant Church for the Glory of God, Part 2

Psalm 133

February 7, 2016

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Last week, we examined our church covenant by answering two questions: What is a covenant and why do we have a church covenant? We saw first that the underlying purpose of God's covenant, throughout the Bible, is to choose for Himself a people out of the whole of sinful man to whom He will give Himself as their God and Lord, and who will give themselves to Him as His people. A covenant is an agreement, a binding oath, in which God make promises of blessing, explains the requirements for man to be in covenant, and describes the penalties for failing to keep covenant. We talked about God's covenant with Abraham... We talked about the covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai... Ultimately we looked at the New Covenant in Christ's blood, pictured by the Lord's Supper and accomplished through His perfect life, atoning death and resurrection from the dead. The New Covenant in Christ's blood creates the church, a new people, a forgiven people who have had their sins forever atoned for by the sacrifice of Jesus and who have been delivered from the wrath of God, a people who are born from above and given the Holy Spirit, a changed people, a people who trust and believe God, who desire to be obedient to God, who want to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and who want to love their neighbors as themselves. The beauty of this New Covenant is that Christ seals it by His blood, purchasing eternal life and forgiveness of sins, giving us His perfect righteousness so that we stand before God as people who are justified and declared "not guilty," and He also produces in us by His Spirit, the faith and the obedience – the outworking of real faith – that we must have to inherit eternal life. So, God enters into this relationship of love and blessing with sinners in order to identify them as His own, to distinguish them from the world, to call them to righteousness, to make them His witness, to display and share in His glory, and to do all of this together.

Then we saw that the very plan and will of God is that we would find the strength to remain and persevere in this covenant of salvation by folding our lives together in deep relationships with other people in covenant with God, relationships fueled by the word of God – relationships which encourage us, and exhort us, and stir us up to faithfulness to

Christ and to pouring ourselves out for the kingdom of God in the context of the local church. And the very nature of relationships is that they require commitment to flourish and to be life-giving. They require covenant commitment. Christ has created us to be His people, not individual followers but a people, a body, for Himself. To fulfill that calling demands that we come together and form local churches, visible churches, which covenant together to be the visible body of Christ for the glory of God, for each other, and for the world.

WSBC can only exist in a meaningful way by means of a covenant commitment by all of us to believe in and trust Christ as Savior and Lord, to worship God, to love each other in gospel ways, and to make Christ known in this world – TOGETHER – as a specific church that testifies to the existence of the invisible church and the eternal church to come. This local church is more than a place. The church is the glorious gathering of the redeemed, the sanctified flock of the great Shepherd, the united household of God, the beautiful body and bride of Christ. God calls His people into covenant, not only to Himself but also to each other. The church covenant, the covenant that we make with one another, is a solemn pledge, an oath to one another and before God, a binding agreement upon the members of this body to fulfill the commands and the duties of Scripture in a special way – not in an exclusive way – but in a special way to this particular group of Christians—the Christians who gather at West Salem Baptist Church. Our relationship with God is founded upon the concept of covenant, and so our relationship with one another must be founded on the same thing.

As we look today at the covenant commitment that we are making to one another in this fellowship, I want us to start by looking at the words of Psalm 133. It is a song of Ascents, written by King David. That is, it was song that was sung by the people of the nation of Israel as they were making their way to Jerusalem for one of the annual feast days where they celebrated together their identity as the covenant people of God. Let's read this again: ***“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”*** (Psalm 133:1–3, ESV)

A Celebration of the Glory of People in Covenant Fellowship with God and Each Other.

What we see in Psalm 133 is David's celebration of the glory of a people in covenant fellowship with God and with one another – a people who belong to God and who belong to each other. David considers the people of God and he just bursts forth: ***Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*** Behold – take a look, feast your eyes upon, gaze at with wonder just how good – how right, how bountiful, how precious, how perfect – and how pleasant – how sweet, how delightful – it is when brothers dwell together in covenant fellowship. How good and pleasant it is when all the people of God, when God's children are of one heart, of one mind, of one soul and live together with their hearts united to God and to one another. It is a beautiful thing, wondrous to behold. Now David was speaking primarily of the nation of Israel, but the application to the local church isn't hard to see.

There is nothing more beautiful on this earth than a church, than the children of God joined together in unity, our hearts intertwined together and united in covenant fellowship to honor God and live for His glory. There is nothing like it on the face of the earth and it is a gift from God. It is what God earnestly desires for His people. It is what Satan dreads and what he works night and day to undo. It is that very thing for which Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane under the lengthening shadow of the cross. It is what the world first saw so convincingly displayed in the infant Jerusalem church – a church where one and all, rich and poor, young and old, free and slave, great and small – were of one heart, one mind, one soul and one Spirit. This covenant fellowship is a gift of God, and it is essential to His church.

The very reason that we can be a united people is found in the fact that we are no longer what we once were – aliens, separated from Christ, and strangers to the covenants of promise. By faith, we are new men and women in covenant with Christ and with one another. We have been cleansed by His blood and redeemed and brought into a new relationship with Him and with one another. In Christ, every other thing that used to define who we are and what we are about has been swallowed up in our new identity in Christ. Do you see it? Our identity is found not in our position in society, not in our race, not in our wealth, not in our lack, not in our lineage, not in our heritage. It's not in our accomplishments, not in our education, not in our profession, not in our looks, not in our physical abilities. Our identity is found in Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen and reigning Savior. Our identity is found in the people of God, in our living for His glory, in our living a life of worship before the face of God. It is an infinitely higher calling than anything we can imagine. We are a part of something in the church that is greater and more profound than any of our lives could ever be individually.

God is calling us to covenant faithfulness to Him and to one another because the calling that we have as the people of God at West Salem Church is bigger than you or me. We are called to behold God and to commune with Him in worship, exalting Him together, magnifying Him together, finding strength and direction and purpose in Him together. We are called to see flow from that worship, transformational discipleship in which we teach one another and encourage one another into maturity in Christ, hold each other accountable, build one another up and care for one another's souls. And then, fueled with compassion and motivated by the clear truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, convinced that we have the only message of salvation and life, to go and reach lost people with the love of Jesus and teach them to be worshippers and disciples of the Living God. Our calling is bigger than just you and me individually. Because of the calling that God has given to this body of believers of which you are a part, it is essential that we be united in covenant faithfulness to one another.

It is the richness of that covenant connection and faithfulness that Psalm 133 captures in such picturesque terms in verses 2 and 3: ***“It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”*** (Psalm 133:2–3, ESV)

This kind of covenant unitedness is like the precious oil on the head. That's a reference to the oil that was used to anoint Aaron, Moses' brother as the High-Priest of the nation. It is the oil of God's anointing, the oil of gladness, the oil of God's manifest presence. It was special oil, specially made – its ingredients and recipe is found in Exodus chapter 30. Myrrh, sweet cinnamon, sweet calamus and cassia, all blended together in olive oil. Upon this precious oil, God pronounced a solemn warning that it was never to be duplicated. It was a unique oil, poured upon Aaron, over his head, dripping through his beard, running down the edge of his garments.

We live in a different world, and much has changed since this passage was written by King David. But I understand the symbolism, don't you? In the covenant fellowship, the committed fellowship of God's people in the church, there is the pouring out of the Spirit of God, of the anointing of God, of His manifest presence, flowing down from heaven, blessing and consecrating our heads and faces and the whole of our lives. When the church comes dwells together, lives folded together, the Spirit of God is poured out in abundance. The presence of God fills the temple. The fragrance of life permeates the entire fellowship – a sweet flood of the anointing of God, the presence of God. It is lavish. It is pervasive. It is impossible to overlook. And just as the oil of anointing could not be duplicated, neither can the outpouring of the presence and the pleasure of God be manufactured by human substitutes. It comes as we dwell in covenant communion with one another and with God.

David says, this covenant communion is like oil and it is as if the dew of Mt. Hermon were falling upon the mountains of Zion. Mt Zion (Jerusalem) was on the edge of the wilderness. It had a poor water supply, unproductive soil, and an uncomfortable climate. Mt Hermon was different. The heaviest dew in Palestine formed nightly on its slopes, making it an area that was lush and fertile – and the source of the Jordan River. The dews of Mt Hermon did not fall on Jerusalem. But what if they did?

What if they brought that refreshment – brought renewal and fruitfulness? How delightful that would be!! What joy that would generate!! What changes that would make in an arid wilderness!! Flowers would flourish, food would grow, grass would replace sand, refreshment would replace thirst and dryness.

Similarly, what if, in Christ, we dwelt together in covenant and committed fellowship, in harmony and unity? It would be like heavy dew on thirsty ground! There would be fruitfulness and joy and growth and richness. There would be ministry, the presence and power of God, a growing, soul-nourishing environment. That is what covenant fellowship brings. That is the picture, beloved. And here is the promise...

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. It is the midst of such a people, united in heart, united in covenant to God and to one another, that the blessing of God – real life, eternal life, satisfying life – flows to thirsty souls. It is in this context of covenant commitment to God and to one another that God in Christ makes us exceedingly glad in Him.

That's why we have a church covenant and why we are talking about it together – because it is in the context of this covenant commitment to God and to one another that we find real life forevermore. Listen, being in covenant with God and with one another puts to death the

very attitudes, mindsets, and sins that cheapen and ruin life, that cheapen and ruin the church.

Being in Covenant with God and with One Another Through Christ Kills... Being in covenant with God and with one another, really folding our lives together under the lordship of Christ kills hyper-individualism where life is all about me and my life is independent of anyone else. It kills the notion of anti-authoritarianism where the self is supreme, I am my own authority and I am responsible to no one. It kills selfishness and narcissism. It kills the allure of sin that masquerades as freedom and life because we find our lives with Christ and with those who love Him. It kills the commitment-phobia of our age. It kills directionlessness and waywardness and gives us stability and structure. It destroys utilitarianism and consumerism that treats the church and the fellowship of the saints as just something to use for my benefit, the consumerism where we worship when we want to, attend when we want to, are accountable only to the degree we want, submit only to whom we want, give and serve only when it is convenient.

One pastor has said: **Basically the problem is that a great number of professing Christians approach the local church with a consumeristic mentality. They see themselves as consumers of a product. The product is worship, preaching, youth and children's ministry. So, they will attend a church as long as it is not too inconvenient. They are like price shoppers, who buy a particular brand of coffee or cereal, until they find another brand that is cheaper, or is sold in a store closer to home. We should never approach our involvement in a church solely with the question, "What's in it for me?" "How far will I have to drive?" "How much of my time will be required?" All of those questions stem from worldly, consumeristic attitudes. When we join ourselves to a church, we should not be like a leech sucking the life from its host, and when it has sucked the life dry, it moves on to another host.** Beloved, we don't want that do we? We want something better, something real. We want a covenant-shaped church. So, what promises are we making before God and before each other when we promise the words of this church covenant?

The Promises of the Church Covenant Just look with me at these words. These are all rooted in and lifted from the pages of Scripture as you can see from the Bible references sprinkled throughout. Look at the first section:

Having been brought by God's grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we now, depending upon the Holy Spirit, establish this covenant with one another. In all we do, we will aim to glorify and enjoy the God of our salvation, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things: to Him be all glory forever! (1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36)

What are we saying here? First, we are making a confession about the truth of our salvation in Christ – that it is all of God's grace to us. We are sinners and we need a Savior, we need a Redeemer and there is no other Savior than Jesus Christ our Lord. We are indebted to God for saving us, not because of anything in us – our imagined goodness, or imagined not-so-badness – but in spite of our real sin He set His love upon us and determined not to leave us in our sin and under His wrath. **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For**

we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV)

And in light of God’s grace to save us and make us His people, together we are making the declaration and agreeing together that we are committed to doing two things – glorifying and enjoying God together – magnifying and making much of God, enjoying His fellowship, enjoying life in Him, living the doxology of Paul in Romans 11:36, **“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:36, ESV)** How will we do that?

Section 2: We will eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by walking together in love and in the Spirit and by putting away all bitterness, anger, and injurious speech. (Eph. 4:3; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 4:29, 31) With humility and gentleness, patience and love, we will be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us. (Eph. 4:1-2; Luke 17:3; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:22) We will carry each other’s burdens, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 12:15)

We are promising to maintain and nourish together the covenant fellowship and family unity that we enjoy as the children of God by putting off the ways in which the world without Christ spends its energies and relates to one another – bitterness, anger, injurious speech – gossip, slander and the like, fractured from one another. Instead we are promising to strive to put on and to act toward one another in accordance with the new life in Christ that we have – in earnest and real love, in humility, counting others better than ourselves, in patience, being kind, tender in our hearts toward one another, forgiving and seeking forgiveness, helping to bear burdens and hardships, rejoicing and weeping with one another. This is our commitment to one another in the body of Christ. This is life, beloved. Then, section 3:

We will train our children in the instruction of the Lord, seeking to walk in a way that adorns the gospel of Christ before our family, friends, and neighbors (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 1 Pet. 3:1). We will strive to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, as we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Gal. 5:22-24; Titus 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:14)

We are promising to pass on and propagate the faith, to be faithful to making the gospel known. These promises are our commitment to our families and to the world around us,

together. We are promising to put the gospel before our kids faithfully, to walk in such a way that is faithful to the gospel promises and truth in our homes, before our friends and before our neighbors who desperately need to know Christ. And to do that, we are promising before God and one another to strive in the power of the Holy Spirit to live self-controlled, that is, disciplined lives, In a righteous, upright way, lives that are godly where we decrease and Christ increases – living as those who will give an account to God. For that to happen, section 4:

We will not neglect to gather together, but will support and treasure the biblical preaching of the whole counsel of God, the faithful observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the loving exercise of church discipline. (Heb. 10:25; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 11:26; Matt 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13) We will contribute cheerfully and generously to the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the advancement of the gospel both to our neighbors and the nations. (Matt. 28:19; Luke 12:33; 2 Cor. 9:7) We will, when we move from this place, unite as soon as possible with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

We are pledging and promising our commitment to the church, to this church. We are promising to be here, to invest our lives here, to worship God here. We are promising to meet together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, as the spiritual children of our heavenly Father, to offer worship to God, to give and to receive strength and encouragement to one another. We are promising not only to hear, but to treasure and to support the preaching of the whole counsel of God. We are promising to hold the Word of God in the highest esteem, to hear it and to love it and to obey it. We are promising to engage in the marks of the true church – baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to be accountable to God's Word, through the loving practice of church discipline. We are promising to contribute, to sacrificially contribute, to give back for the expenses and ministries of the church. And we are promising that, should God move us away from this city, that we will find a faithful church, in that place to which God has led us, in which to live out this promise with other faithful believers. We are simply promising to live as the church, as the people of God, whom Christ has redeemed us to be. We know we cannot do it on our own and so the words of section 5:

In all these things, we rely on our God who has made a new and everlasting covenant with us, saying: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. . . . I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good . . . with all my heart and all my soul." (Jer. 32:38-41)

We know that the strength to do this can only be found in the empowering and transforming grace of God who has made covenant with us in Christ and so we pledge to rely on Him and look to Him for the strength to make this covenant a reality. And then last, the promise that the elders make to you and to the Lord in section 6:

We, the elders of WSBC, while living the above, also covenant with you that we will: lead the church as humble servants (Acts 20:28; Philippians 2:1-4), appoint leaders that meet the biblical criteria (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), watch over your souls as men who will give an

account (Heb. 13:17), equip you for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-14), administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, preach God's word (1 Tim. 3:2, 4:11-13; 2 Tim 4:1-2, Titus 1:9), pray for you, and strive to be examples of faith that can be imitated for God's glory (Heb. 13:7).

In all of these promises to fulfill the calling as elders as the Scriptures define it, we are promising to take our obligations to the Lord and to you seriously, with gravity, with weightiness, with joyful responsibility – to be faithful to this household of God.

Silly or Sacred? Now here's the truth – such an exalted picture of committed covenant relationship to one another seems silly as long as we're content with superficial relationships and shallow connections and superficial and nominal Christianity. But it's not silly, it is sacred. I know and I believe that it is not silly to you. I pray that this is what you are longing for. I know I am. Gretchen asked me earlier this week what it would look like if all of us said, "yes and amen" to this covenant. This is by no means exhaustive or complete but let me close by sharing with you how the thought of this covenant commitment gives hope to me, what I think it would look like.

I believe that if all of us committed to this covenant whole-heartedly, it would be immediately obvious in some very practical ways. First, corporate worship on Wednesdays and Sundays would look different and better. There would be no more wild swings in attendance on Sundays, more than a fraction of the congregation here on Wednesday nights. There would be a longing to be together and worshipping Christ together. Each person would embrace the responsibility and the joy of worshipping corporately – taking ownership in a way that honors the Lord and edifies one another. We would work our schedules around worship...not the other way around.

I believe that if all of us committed to this covenant together that all of the active ministries in our church would be better attended, fully staffed, and as a result would truly flourish. We wouldn't see ministry as someone else's responsibility but our own. Ministries wouldn't start and then fall off. We wouldn't start and quit. Everyone would be actively looking for ways to serve Christ and each other... not just in formal ways, but in all sorts of ways. Everyone would have a stake.

I believe that if all of us committed to this covenant whole-heartedly, we would meet our church budget and have money left to spare. Generosity would flourish and it would be a delight to give to Christ and His church.

Those are the obvious and practical things, quantifiable results of us committing whole-heartedly to this covenant, but think with me of what this would do on a deeper level. Because everyone was invested and helping to carry the load in different ways, we would be get to know each other better and therefore love each other more. We would see each other more, get to pray and minister together, be more invested in one another, and really get to know one another. Corporate prayer and fasting would have real power because our hearts and our lives would truly be one. We would be much more intentional about praying for and with one another.

Serving each other would be a joy and not a duty. Nothing would be too much and nothing would be insignificant. The consumer mindset of check in, get what I came for and check out would be effectively crushed. The question of “What am I getting out of church?” wouldn’t even cross our minds because we would be more concerned with how am I serving my brothers and sisters and this body of Christ. Communication in the church would be so much easier and clearer. No one would miss out on the life of the church because they weren’t around. We would be on the same page – not living separate lives but living life together.

It would encourage an atmosphere of real gospel living. One of the hallmarks of Christianity is forgiveness and grace. That atmosphere would pervade our fellowship. We would be more gracious and less exacting. We would be more willing to overlook personal offences but where something had to be confronted, we would handle each other’s failures with grace, mercy, love and maturity, earnestly and gladly extending forgiveness knowing that whatever the sin or offence, Christ has already paid its penalty. And on the flipside, if we have sinned against another, we would be compelled to make it right and seek forgiveness so that we do not treat the grace of God with contempt.

It would create an atmosphere that really was soul-nourishing and sanctifying. It would encourage an atmosphere of steadfastness to Scriptural truth, openness, transparency with one another, and accountability. It would give us the ability to truly deal with sin and grow in Christ, because there would be a spirit of grace that encouraged repentance. There would be a freedom to grow and mature in Christ because petty squabbles would evaporate as Christ and others-centeredness choked the life out of self-centeredness. Gossip, suspicion, the passing of unbiblical judgment, passing judgment on matters of personal conviction and conscience would die.

If we all committed to this covenant whole-heartedly, it would lead to more trusting hearts toward one another, deeper and better and more beneficial friendships. We could speak the truth in love to one another with the fear of someone just walking away. We could give our hearts and invest in one another the fear of it being in vain. No more people leaving for no good reason. We would be done with that. There would be a greater commitment to working things out and loving one another. We would take membership and belonging to one another more seriously – a gospel bond that would not and could not be broken because we would truly believe that if Christ is truly able to raise us from the dead and deliver us from our sins, there is nothing too great for him to do.

And because of that, there would be a very real sense of excitement, stability, strength, security, safety and durability in the body. As a result we would be much more evangelistic. We couldn’t help it. The real experience of gospel life would be powerful and moving and we would want desperately for other people to know what we have found in Christ. We couldn’t be silenced!

Our leadership would be encouraged and so would everyone else. This life that we have in Christ and in the church, when all of us are committed to it – it’s like nothing else in the world, its supernatural, its other worldly, its life giving.

Really, it would be a revival of sorts. There would be the highest regard and hunger for the Word of God – for true, real, faithful, gospel and Bible preaching, a desire to obey and to know and follow Christ more and live lives that are holy – set apart for Him, the move of God’s Spirit to strengthen us to fulfill these promises which are all in accordance with His Word, and an undeniable personal and corporate testimony to the gospel God’s presence would be rich and satisfying to our souls.

You know, beloved, I see glimpses of this fruit right now and that gives me great hope. And as much as I can envision even more, I am convinced that it is far less than what God has in mind for us if we truly commit to this covenant, all of us, together. I realize as I’m preaching this that ultimately what we are yearning for is heaven, but we can have a piece of heaven on this earth. But the nature of this covenant is that it does not and it cannot work unless we are all, each one of us, committed to it. Each one of us has some shoring up to do, even if we are a faithful and church member. This covenant is godly and its good and I pray that each of us would with one heart commit to it and let us see what God will do.

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2016

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.