
The Chapel Covenant: What & Why

Titus 2

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Introduction

If you were to come live in the Berry home for a few weeks, you would quickly detect that our family has a very distinct culture. You would note norms, mores, life-ways, taboos, etc., and you would see that they are constantly repeated and reinforced. You would also note that when a member of the family gets out of sync, as we often do, the harmony of the home is disrupted.

To a great extent, our family is held together by a set of mutually held expectations. Our 4-year old, Reuben, already knows and understands many of those expectations and he works very ambitiously to communicate those to our 2-year old, Theo, each and every day – right down to exercising his own form of corporal punishment. Theo is still learning what it means to live in the Berry home – 37 times a day he asks the question, “Why?” when given a command. For better or worse, my wife, Beth, and I, have created a highly complex and structured system that makes official, the way the Berrys roll – this is what both distinguishes and associates us with the Baileys, or the Thompsons, or the Estoyes...

This is certainly not unique. Every family and social group on Earth does this and society has benefitted much from it. But it is not all a good news story because here is a fact – Beth and I often get it wrong. The family culture we have built has flaws. We overvalue stuff and undervalue people. We love convenience too much and love sacrifice too little. We are zealous about our earthly kingdom and lackadaisical about the heavenly kingdom...

At the Chapel, we often explain the church as a family of families – if that is the case, then we would expect to find all of what we just discussed in place... a culture, a way of living, etc. But – there is a significant difference between the church’s expectations and norms and that of our individual families. The expectations involved with being a member of God’s family (that is, the church) are perfect. Flawless. Wholly righteous. That is because God himself has given them to us and ***The Law of the Lord is perfect... the precepts of the Lord are right... the commandment of the Lord is pure... the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold*** (Psalm 19:7-10).

This morning we will begin a discussion that will last two Sundays concerning the Chapel Covenant. This is part of the series we have been doing on what it means to be a member at the Chapel. Just in case we have not said it clearly, Clearcreek Chapel is a church that believes all Christians should strive to be formally associated with a local body of believers. These days, and in this culture, we often refer to this as membership. More than simply asserting this, however, we are endeavoring to help you see the biblical pattern and wisdom in the call to membership. In past weeks, Pastors Dan and Mark have established the Old and New Testament arguments for formally being identified with the body of Christ. Pastor Steve last week began to help us think through the implications of membership with his sermon on stewardship and this morning we will continue that focus on implications by addressing the Chapel covenant.

How many of you know what the “Chapel Covenant” is? Now if you are in my flock, you are not allowed to participate in this survey. I want you to raise your hand when you think I am speaking of the Chapel Covenant and the way this survey works is that you have to vote the first time you think you hear the correct option – you don’t get to hear all the choices first... Here are your options:

- By God’s grace and through his word, we will cultivate in the heart of God’s people...
- Savoring the supremacy of God; Studying the Word of God; Shaping the people of God...
- The Elders have developed The Truths We Treasure as the basic statement of doctrine that each member of the church must believe and affirm.
- Recognizing our responsibility to obey all the Scriptures and the need to distinguish ourselves from the world as a community of believers, all members shall affirm their commitment to please God in all areas of life by entering into this covenant...

[Transition noting results of survey] [Pray]

What is the Chapel Covenant?

It seems that many of you are just like me (or like Franklin/Monroe flock!). When I became a member at the Chapel, well over 10 years ago, I would have read the book of Faith and Order as our membership process requires. The Book of Faith and Order is the document that describes what the Chapel believes (faith) and how it shall function (order) – a charter document of sorts and common in many churches. Formally, the introduction in our Book of Faith and Order self-describes its contents as “confession, covenant, and constitution.” You can get a copy at our information booth, at the Chapel office, or online under the “about us” tab. In this document is a section called the Chapel Covenant. It states the following:

Recognizing our responsibility to obey all the Scriptures and the need to distinguish ourselves from the world as a community of believers, all members shall affirm their commitment to please God in all areas of life by entering into this covenant:

Humbly depending on the Holy Spirit's enabling and aiding us, and affirming The Truths We Treasure, we Covenant to Glorify God by striving...

Following this opening, the Chapel Covenant goes on to describe, generally, the kind of life that is pleasing to God. Surprised? About a month ago I was too! Curious, I browsed comparable documents at other churches. We attended Cornerstone Church in South Carolina last weekend on a little family get away – they called a similar section in their constitution “Christian Conduct”. At Capitol Hill Baptist Church, for those of you who follow the 9Marks ministry, it is simply identified as their Covenant. Similarly, at Bethlehem Baptist, for those of you served well by DesiringGod ministries, it is also referred to as their Covenant.

Simply put, a church covenant is a statement of how a church has agreed to live together – creating the common commitments that undergird a functional community – very similar to what happens in a family. The Chapel covenant contains nothing different than what you find in the Word, it simply highlights and calls out specific aspects that shape the life of the body – as one church has put it, “is equal parts promise, summary of expectations, ethical

statement, and biblical standard.” If you have not read ours in a while, perhaps since you became a member, I invite you to check it out on the [website](#) today or sometime this week – you will find it under Article 6¹. It will be helpful preparation for next week’s sermon when we move through the various specific points of the covenant. [Pray]

Why Do We Have a Chapel Covenant?

So why should the Chapel require its members to agree to a covenant and thereby make a serious and sober promise? Although we could come up with a moderate-sized list of legitimate responses to this question, we are going to let the Book of Titus both shape and limit our explanations this morning – focusing mostly on Titus chapter 2.

The book of Titus is titled “Titus” because it is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a man named Titus. Titus and Paul had previously been together preaching the gospel to the people who lived on the island of Crete. As far as we know, they were the first persons to bring the good news of the gospel to these people. Paul, however, could not stick around to see a church established for those had become Christians – he was on a journey to Rome. Therefore, he left Titus at Crete, *so that [he] might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town...* (1:5).

Thus we get a fascinating look into what it was like at the ground level for these new churches – what God, through the Apostle Paul, identified as important and necessary. What we find is both reassuring and challenging. Reassuring because what Paul calls for is exactly what we would expect him to call for based on his other writings: faith and order. Challenging because Paul is actually very specific in detailing who and what the church is to be.

If the Gospel, Then a Way of Living

And this is the first of three observations we are going to make from our text this morning: If the gospel – then – a way of living. Let’s read *Titus 2:1-10*. In almost all of Paul’s letters you are going to find what is essentially a highly detailed list that specifies and commands what the church’s attitudes, words, and behaviors are to be. Where the gospel call goes out – there is always the call to gospel-living. So perhaps we should not be surprised when a contemporary church includes in its membership documentation a requirement that the member promise (or covenant) to aspire to a certain standard. It is merely a reflection of what Paul does repeatedly in the New Testament.

Let’s note that there is no sense here that it was up to the Cretans to come up with some version of church or body-life that suited their particular age group or ethnic group or lifestyle group or culture in a manner that superseded Paul’s instructions... There was to be no “first church of Mediterranean island-dwelling lazy gluttons.” Not at all. Instead, Paul makes it very clear – this is the way that Christians live. Note the declarative nature of Paul’s instructions: verse 2 – *older men are to be*; verse 3 – *older women... are to be... are to teach... [are] to train*; verse 6 – *young men [are] to be*;

¹ Also see page 7 of downloadable PDF version of Book of Faith and Order: <http://www.clearcreekchapel.org/uploads/Clearcreek-Chapel-Book-of-Faith-and-Order.pdf>

verse 7 Titus, the interim pastor, was *to be...*; verse 9 – *slaves are to be*. Wisdom will dictate how this obedience is worked out in every local expression of believers, but it must be worked out. There is to be no such thing as a church where what you act like doesn't matter. For many, however, if the church makes any attempt at designating certain things as unacceptable, or prescribing what is "right" conduct, they will condemn it as narrow-minded, unloving, doctrinaire, harsh or judgmental. Yet these same people in their own homes will demand a certain kind of living from those who live with them.

Beloved, according to the pattern of Scripture, we should be concerned when a church seems to have very *little* interest in its members' attitudes, words, and behaviors – This is not to say the church's main role is to become the sin police of the world – it is not! But – the pattern of Scripture stands – if the gospel – then – a way of living.

Because the Gospel, Then a Way of Living

We cannot stop there, however, because Paul does not stop there. This way of living is merely a product. Because an apple tree then apples, and in the case of the church, because an orchard, then an entire harvest... which can feed the nations. Let's *read verses 11-14* together.

Regardless of your translation, you are going to see that the first word of verse 11 is "*For*." This links the "the church should be this way" language of verses 1-10 to the realities of verses 11-14. What is true always issues forth in what is done. Leap buildings in a single bound *for* you come from Krypton! Use that hammer *for* you come from Asgard! Strive to live the Christian life *for* – *the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people* – this is the gospel, or good news of Jesus Christ, who through his death on the cross bore the punishment due me because of my sin against a holy God and who obeyed God's law perfectly on my behalf... rescuing me from the damning wrath of God. This historical act of the real person Jesus Christ, frees me from the power of sin. *We know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] in order that... we would no longer be enslaved to sin* (Romans 6:6). You see, the gospel is far more than a spiritual transaction that has taken place in the heavenlies, it is a transforming reality. The gospel changes everything, including me. The gospel, when truly embraced, truly transforms. This is why Paul goes on in verse 12 to describe the practical outworking of the gospel. It, the gospel, trains us *to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives...*

Rightly understanding the Chapel's Covenant then, means that we will not read it simply as "Thou shalt" but rather, "Thou shalt because thou art..." REDEEMED. As Paul puts it at the end of v.14, *Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*. In this letter to Titus, again and again, as Paul lays out the fundamentals for the churches springing up in Crete, he reemphasizes that that the gospel truly embraced, truly transforms. If this is not the pattern evident in the church, then the church has embraced something else than the one true gospel and may not even be a church. The Chapel Covenant calls us to commit to being who we truly are.

The absence of this commitment is what was threatening the church in Crete... people infiltrating the church with a message that was not the gospel – but passing for the gospel and guess what it looked like? Well, we don't have to guess, Paul describes it at the end of chapter 1. If you let your eyes skim over verses 10 through 16 you will see words like this... *insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, corrupting, liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons*. And Paul finishes the description off with this summary about those who embrace a kind of gospel that does not transform: (v.16) *They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work*. May God keep us from this at the Chapel and may our covenant together remind us that we are a people of the true gospel – a fact which has life changing implications, every day. Again, Paul is not finished. If the gospel, then a way of living. Because the gospel, then a way of living, and finally, for those without the gospel, then a way of living.

For Those Without the Gospel, Then a Way of Living

Besides the “grand reason” given in verse 2:11 for living a transformed life, Paul has identified another reason that is oriented toward those who are not in the church, who do not have the gospel. Very briefly, note verses 5, 8, and 10 in chapter 2 and the first few verses in chapter 3 with me – in each case Paul provides additional rationale for the kind of obedience he is calling believers to: (v.5) *...that the word of God may not be reviled*. (v.8) *...so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us*. (v.10) *...so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior*. (3:1-2) *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling and to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people*.

It is undeniable that - as Paul calls the church to live in a way that demonstrates the transforming nature of the gospel – he has those without the gospel, that is, the watching world, in mind. Why? First, Paul is keen that the church would accurately shape the world's perception of the gospel, the Word from which it comes to be known, and the Savior who has made it all happen. Paul has good reason for this concern does he not? So much glory has been robbed from God by the church – not by failing to obey necessarily – that will be part and parcel of the church until Christ returns. But by failing to repent – that is to call sin, sin and to turn from it in heart and in action and thereby display how the gospel changes people. The travesty is not that Christians sin, it is that they do not change... While Bible-believing Christians would question the genuineness of such a person's faith, the world simply questions the faith itself or worse yet, God himself.

So there is the protection of the testimony of Christ before a watching world, but there is also a proclamation of the gospel to a dying world. Our good works, our Christian living, our commitment to being transformed by the gospel, gives the unbeliever reason to consider the gospel as it pertains to their own lives. Paul says, *show perfect courtesy to all people* (v.2). *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray...* (v.3) *But[!] when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...* (v.4) *These things are excellent and profitable for all people* (v.8).

Christian conduct – that is genuine attitudes, behaviors, and words – the Chapel Covenant, is not first and foremost about setting up a stark contrast between us and them. God forbid we become a church that looks down our nose at unbelievers or believes that the primary difference between unbelievers and believers is what they do or don't do... Christian conduct is, and has always been, about the glorious transforming power of the gospel and our great king, Jesus Christ, who has made it all possible. When unbelievers see believers living out the gospel, they are confronted with a reality that is not of this world. When believers see unbelievers living without the gospel, they are reminded of how they were once lost in sin and how the loving kindness of their Savior rescued them. We hope and pray that unbelievers might come to know this same rescue – don't we?! And that our conduct would present no stumbling block but would adorn and beautify the faith in a manner that makes it irresistible.

May our consideration of the word this morning make us the humblest and happiest of people dead set on living in an ever-growing obedience to God by the grace he has given *for he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works* (3:5-9).

[Pray]