

A Commitment to Grow in Personal Holiness

(Church Covenant Part I)

"To depend on the Spirit, maturing in repentant faith through regular study of the Word, consistent praying, and daily worship of God."

Introduction – Tonight we will be addressing the first section of our church covenant. This section underlines our personal growth in holiness, and so while we commit to these things as a congregation, we are stating to one another that we commit to grow in personal holiness. However, my desire is that tonight would not be merely an informational sermon about our covenant, but would be a time for you to examine your own hearts and grow in holiness.

1. Depend on the Spirit
2. Mature in Repentant Faith (1 John 3:8-10)
 - a. Cherishing God's Word
 - b. Growing in Prayer
 - c. Worshipping God Daily

I. Depend on the Spirit

We often use this phrase when we talk about our spiritual growth, but what does it mean to depend on the Spirit? I think that Paul lays out an excellent example for us in Galatians 5.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. – Galatians 5:16-24

To depend on the Spirit brings this idea that we are at war within ourselves. We are at war with sin. We are at war with former habits. We are at war with our flesh. Our flesh desires to do what is wrong, but if we are believers then we have the Spirit of God within us to help us wage war on the flesh. This on-going battle in the believer's heart causes a tension within us so that we don't give ourselves over to sin, but instead we ask for the Spirit to overpower the desires of our hearts. A believer cannot grow in holiness and repentance apart from the Spirit's work. Therefore, we must look to Christ and depend on the Spirit to give us victory over sin and grow in holiness.

I don't know how many of you will be able to relate with this, but I want to make sure that this point is clear. Sometimes, we as believers may hit a point where we are literally scared of our sins. We might undergo such an intense temptation and strong urge to sin that we are literally paralyzed by our fear of giving in. This fear is a sign of our lack of trust and faith that God will deliver us from the enemy. Instead, we should ponder the reality that we have something far greater within us.

...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. – 2 Timothy 1:7

Ultimately, our dependence on the Spirit and His work should cause us to hate our sin and grow in godliness. Anything good that comes out of us *must* be attributed to the Spirit's sanctifying work and cannot be of us, lest we steal glory due the Father for His intervention in our lives. A Christian who is depending on the Spirit is not puffed up, is not prideful, does not boast in self, but humbly recognizes the power of God that has transformed them and brought them from death to life.

So we commit one to another that it is not of ourselves that we grow in holiness but purely the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

II. Mature in Repentant Faith

A Christian *must* grow in repentance. No believer can continue to make a practice of sin in their lives. If you are a believer, then you must put to death the addictions and idols of the heart and grow in purity.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. – 1 John 3:8-10

Therefore, we must mature in a repentant faith and grow in personal godliness.

a. Cherishing God's Word

God did something very specifically when he created the Universe. Do you remember what He did that brought everything into existence? He spoke. Did God cease from speaking after everything was created? No, He continued to speak to His children through various mediators – the

prophets, the priests and the kings. Even though man rebelled against God and profaned His holy name, God still spoke to His people. And God has continued to speak throughout the millennia until Christ came in His incarnate form, the ultimate fulfillment of God's Word.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

The term for "Word" that John purposefully uses here in this passage is *Logos* and he parallels the creation account in Genesis 1. He does this to point out that Jesus *was* the "Word of God" that created the universe and that Jesus *is* the "Word of God" that has come to us. Therefore, we ought to cherish the Word of God and recognize its power to change lives and cause us to repent. Note this. What passage in the Scripture speaks most about cherishing the Word of God? Psalm 119. This passage is by far the largest passage in the Scriptures and speaks again and again about how the psalmist delights in the Word of God. He even says that the Word of God will help him refrain from sin.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. – Psalm 119:11

This is a foundational truth and a great help to us who are trying to refrain from sin and grow in godliness. If we can read Scripture so that it is in our minds and memorize Scripture so that it is in our hearts, truly we will have victory over the sins that so easily ensnare us.

So we commit one to another to cherish God's Word and regard it as essential to our Christian lives.

b. Growing in Prayer

You might as reasonably expect to find a living man without breath, as a true Christian without the spirit of prayer and supplication. – George Whitefield

This quote by George Whitefield brings in an earnestness and necessity of every believer to find personal time with God. It is as vital to the believer as breath. We often forget, don't make time, or wholly neglect to seek the Lord in prayer, but it is prayer that teaches us not to rely on ourselves but completely on the grace of God. Prayer is the vehicle through which every believer approaches the throne of God. And God desires that we run to Him lest we become burdened and weighed down by trials and hardships of this life. Instead, He desires that we experience the freedom we have in Him and the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:4-7

The non-praying Christian is one who does not fully embrace that Christ has completed all when he cried, "It is finished!" Instead, they lean on their own efforts to live life well and appease God, however, they have missed a foundational truth about being a child of God. It is not by our own efforts that we merit Christ's righteousness, but by the very sacrifice of Christ and Him alone. The more a believer embraces this understanding, the more they will lean on Christ and beg Him for His gentle leading.

A true believer in Christ will not decrease or remain constant in their prayer life, but a true believer grows as they find surpassing worth in clinging to Jesus and asking Him for his consistent intervention in our hearts and lives. Some of you in this room are older have felt the power of God calling you to pray more out of your weakness and cling to Christ for His strength and righteousness. Recognizing, that with each passing day, it is His mighty right hand that sustains you. And for us who are younger in this room, let us by God's grace embrace the reality that we cannot persist in our own strength, but let us run to Christ in prayer.

If you are a believer in Christ, then you have been called into a mediatorial work to pray for those around you. Mediate for your families, mediate for your coworkers, mediate for your neighbors, and mediate for you church. As representative and as a priest, you have been called to this position. Exercise it for the glory of God.

So we commit one to another to grow in prayer and mediate for those around us.

c. Worshiping God Daily

We commonly come together and worship the Lord here on Sundays. This is the day of the week that has been attributed to the Christian faith for millennia. But let me ask you a question. Is God only Lord over Sunday? No, our God is Lord over every day. One of the reasons why I love this statement in our covenant is because we recognize that our worship is not a worship reserved for Sundays alone, but a worship that should be expressed every day of the week. What good is it to worship God on Sunday when the other six days are reserved for the idols of our hearts? Beloved, let us not become hypocrites so that our children and friends and family see us one way on Sunday morning and then as something completely different throughout the rest of the week. It will have an effect on the little eyes watching us.

This is by no means an exhortation to tell you "you better not sin again – ever! Or else your children will think you're a hypocrite." Obviously that weight is impossible to bear. Yes, we should refrain from sin because we have a High Priest Who loves us and gave Himself for us, but we will never be perfect until we see Him in glory. So the exhortation is to worship God daily by confessing our weaknesses and claiming the blood of Christ that washed us white as snow.