

THE BAPTIST LANDMARK

“REMOVE NOT THE ANCIENT LANDMARK, WHICH THY FATHERS HAVE SET.” PROVERBS 22:28

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BAPTISM

by M. A. Brawner

The Bible teaches the clear distinction between being part of the family of God and a member of the Lord's true New Testament Church. A person must have an experience of being born again to enter the family of God. Afterwards, a child of God must receive valid, scriptural baptism in order to enter the Church. Without all parts being in order, baptism is invalid and the child of God remains outside of the Church. The child of God may have been immersed in water, but when the order was missed, they only got wet. If a child of God misses serving the Lord in His Church, that child of God will miss out for all eternity on all the blessings that come with loyal service. Seeing this is an eternally important subject, let's consider some details relating to it.

Biblical Order: Blood before Baptism

The early years of my ministry was spent while I was on active duty in the military. This gave me the opportunity to preach and interact with people around the country. It still stands out in my mind what many preachers who called themselves Baptist had to say about baptism. It was plainly said to me that it was more important to get people in Church than to worry about the details around baptism. They told me it was first important to get them in the Church then work on ensuring they are born again. Baptism was esteemed lightly seeing it had no part in salvation. Baptism was just how a person got to join the Church. To me, it sounded like a person should be made to think they were a church member by baptizing them, then work on their salvation. This is nothing short of deception.

The biblical order to obtain scriptural baptism and become a member of the Lord's Church requires a person to be born again before they can be baptized. For example, John the Baptist required fruit worthy of repentance before he would baptize a person, Luke 3:8. This fruit is a person's testimony of being born again.

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CHURCH COVENANT

by H. B. Little

I have scarcely entered a pulpit where a church covenant was not hanging above it. This church covenant is usually adopted by a church upon their organization. It is an agreement between church members outlining our duties toward God and one another. When we join a church, we enter into this covenant with one another and agree to perform the duties outlined in it.

Among the Baptist churches in Middle Tennessee, John Newton Brown's church covenant is commonly used. He published this covenant along with The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith in his "A Baptist Church Manual" in 1853. If this is the one adopted by your church, I hope you are familiar with it. Maybe you have a copy of it, and you read it often and are reminded of your commitment to the church and your duties as a member. If you do not have a copy, I have attached one to the end of this article. Whether this or another covenant has been adopted by your church, I encourage you to read your covenant. You have committed yourself to perform the duties described in it.

During my ordination, the brother who charged the newly ordained encouraged us to read often the qualifications for ordination found in 1 Timothy and Titus. He also encouraged us to compare ourselves to these qualifications and strive to meet them. He gave us wise counsel. The same principle can be applied to all church members. We should read often the Bible and biblical principles found in the church covenant and strive to fulfill our commitment as members.

Let's consider a few of our responsibilities found in Brown's church covenant. We agree "to walk together in Christian love." Our Lord taught us to love one another. When people can see a godly love between us, we set ourselves apart from the world. The Lord promised that by this love "shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples." John 13:34. When visitors and young members of the church see our

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A COVENANT WITH OUR EYES

by K. L. Slayton

King Solomon said in the long ago "there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and that still holds true today. While we may point to certain things that we face in our generation and think that they are of recent invention, if we look closer at them we can see that while they may be more prevalent in our day and more easily accessible, they are not new. One such thing that is plaguing us today is pornography. While pornography is certainly of no new invention, it is more readily accessible today than it ever has been before. It seems that much of our society has been, as Paul said in Romans 1:28, given over to a reprobate mind. The result is that sexual images fill the pages of magazines, the billboards by the roadside, and especially the screens of our televisions and other media devices. This constant exposure to sexual images poses a great danger not only to society in general but also to us as believers.

Consider 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. "For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God." This scripture, along with others, plainly teaches us that fornication, in all its forms, is sin. Some might say that it's permissible to look but not touch. This is a very faulty line of thinking. Consider what our Lord said in Matthew 5:27-28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." We can know with all certainty by His statement that it is sin for us to look upon and lust after a member of the opposite sex that we're not in a marriage covenant with. God has given us the proper means by which we can satisfy our sexual desires and those means are found in our spouses. Consider 1 Corinthians 7:1-9:

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THE BIG CHURCH

The following article was made available to The Baptist Landmark by Bro. Jason Howard, pastor of Canaan Missionary Baptist Church in Richton, Mississippi. It is from the October 28, 1954 issue of *The Baptist Record*. Written by W. Barry Garrett, the article is a good lesson on the nature of a New Testament church, being always both visible and local. It also give insight into the ecclesiology of the Southern Baptists in the mid-twentieth century before their departure to the universal church error. Garrett's article, titled *Doctrinally Speaking: Gospel Church*, is provided below:

"I am a member of the 'big' church," said the waitress, piously pointing upward in response to a question as to which church she belonged to.

As she delivered the ham and eggs to our table the question was asked, "And who is pastor of that church?" In confusion she rushed off to get the toast and coffee.

Upon her return we could not resist, "Do you attend that church very often?"

Are you confused about the doctrine of the church as was this waitress? Many people are.

In the New Testament when the church becomes a reality in human experience it takes the form of a local congregation. There is no other ecclesiastical body.

There is no such thing, for instance, as "The Southern Baptist Church," but there are Southern Baptist churches. This is in accord with New Testament terminology which says, "the churches of Galatia," "the churches of Asia," and "the churches of Macedonia."

Each individual church is a separate and complete unit within itself. There is no large or comprehensive group that can lay claim to being "the church" other than a local congregation.

A church must have members. Who should belong? Only people who have been born again, people who are already Christians, can be members of the church.

This is true because Jesus formed His church out of disciples. In the New Testament only those who were being saved were added to the church. Paul addresses church members as "saints," that is, sanctified or holy ones. Only

regenerate people are qualified to carry out the spiritual function of the churches.

The nature of a New Testament church is a spiritual democracy. All believers are on the same level in the sight of God and in the churches. Jesus said, "All ye are brethren."

Christ only is the head of the church. Christ is the only master of each believer. Therefore, there can be no other overlordship in the churches. In the very nature of the case the church is a democratic organism.

I am a member of a New Testament church. Are you?

A COVENANT WITH OUR EYES

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Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

Christ says that to look upon and lust after someone other than our spouse is to commit adultery in our heart. I believe that He used such strong language because of how serious the danger is. Solomon in Proverbs 4:23 warns us to "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." In the 25th verse he tells us that one of the ways that we keep our hearts safe is by letting our eyes look right on, and our eyelids look straight before us. I'm reminded of the sin of King David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and ultimately murdered her husband Uriah to try to hide

his sin. We're told in 2 Samuel 11:2 where the trouble began. "And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon." Here we see that David failed to guard his heart by controlling his eyes. Upon seeing this beautiful woman bathing he allowed himself to lust after her. He could have, and should have, looked away. By failing to control his eyes, he allowed himself to commit adultery in not only his heart but ultimately in his flesh. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:14-15.

As with any sin, there is a price to pay for using and viewing pornography. Statistics show that pornography use increases the marital infidelity rate by more than 300% and that 56% of American divorces involve one party having an "obsessive interest" in pornographic websites. Another troubling statistic is that 68% of church-going men view porn on a regular basis. Of young Christian adults 18-24 years old, 76% actively search for porn. These statistics are sobering and should cause a great deal of concern in God's people. Just because we may not be aware of the problem or are unwilling to admit that there is a problem doesn't mean that there isn't one. Lord help us awaken from our slumber and see the enemy at the gate!

Indecent images are seemingly all around us. While we can't walk around with our eyes closed, we can practice self-control and rein our wandering eyes in. Job said "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" Job 31:1. Let us also make a covenant with our eyes that we may protect our hearts and not allow ourselves to look at the opposite sex in an adulterous way or look at pornographic images.

There's much to be said on this topic concerning our responsibility to guard ourselves and our responsibility to guard the eyes and hearts of our young people. There is an unknown amount of damage being caused to young people through the early and often exposure to pornography through computers and smart phones. Lord willing, we will address this in a future column.

BAPTISM

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Likewise, Philip asked of the Eunuch whether he believed with all his heart before he would administer baptism, Acts 8:37. It is with the heart man believes in order to be saved, Romans 10:10. This presents the order of the "blood before the water". This means a person must put their faith in the shed blood of the Lord to be saved before they can enter the water to become a member of the Lord's New Testament Church. Unless a person is born again before entering the waters of baptism, their baptism is invalid.

No Authorization from God, No Baptism

God authorized and instituted baptism. This is easily understood when we look at the actions of the Lord Jesus Christ in regard to it. The Lord walked nearly 60 miles to the only administrator who was authorized of God to administer baptism. In John chapter 1 verses 6 and 33, we learn that John was the man "sent to baptize". This is more than enough to conclude that he was the God authorized administrator of baptism. When we learn that the Lord walked so far to the authorized agent of God, we find the importance of it. The Lord walked past many whom He could have authorized personally to baptize Him. He didn't just pray in order to find an answer. He went to the one sent from God the Father and yielded to that authorized baptism.

We also see that yielding to what God has authorized justifies God. Consider the following verses from Luke 7:29-30, "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." It is obvious that John was authorized of God to administer baptism. Those who yielded to this baptism, justified God. Those who failed to do so were labeled as those who rejected the counsel of God. So, when the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized of John, God the Father spoke from heaven expressing that He was well pleased, Matt 3:17.

After the Lord was raised from the dead, He stated that "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth," Matt 28:18. With this power, the Lord sent His Church into the world to labor until His return, see John 17:18. Part of what He sent the Church to do was to baptize. Here we find a direct parallel between the Lord's

Church and John the Baptist. John was recognized as authorized of God. Those who yielded to his baptism justified God. The Church has been sent by the Lord and is likewise authorized of God. Those who yield to the baptism it authorizes would justify God as well. On the other hand, those who reject this baptism would reject the counsel of God against themselves.

It is saddening to see how many people either overlook or willingly ignore the Church the Lord sent into the world. Yet, it still remains the authorized agent of God to administer the baptism that pleases Him. To receive the baptism it authorizes results in valid baptism. Anything else is invalid. So then, the idea that "where two or three believers come together, there is a church" has resulted in multitudes of invalid baptisms. Two or three taking it upon themselves to come together results in them ignoring the Lord's Church and the baptism He authorized. The Lord set authority in His Church.

Authorized Institutions Need Qualified Administrators

In the government of the Lord's New Testament Kingdom, God the Father is the only lawgiver. The Church, under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to execute the laws given to it. As it performs baptism, its authority is rightly exercised when it uses it in accordance with the law of God. God is in no wise bound to recognize acts which are performed contrary to His law. By precept and example, the law of God pertaining to baptism is found in the New Testament of the Bible. These precepts and examples reveal that the Church can only perform baptism using an administrator who meets the qualifications established in the New Testament.

What does authority give an institution the right to do? Accredited hospitals have the right or authority to render medical care. However, without the proper administrator (a qualified doctor) they engage in malpractice. Accredited pharmacies have the right or authority to provide controlled medical substances. However, without the proper administrator (a qualified pharmacist) they also engage in malpractice. There are multitudes of examples where a qualified agent must be used by institutions with the right and authority to engage in wide variety of practices. Churches are held to the same

requirement. In order to administer valid baptism, the Lord's Church must use a qualified administrator. Anything short might be comparable to malpractice. So, what does authority give an institution the right to do? It gives it the right to carry out practices in accordance with the law governing that practice. In the case of the Church, that law is found in the New Testament.

It is obvious from the scriptures that the Lord placed the office of the pastor in the Church with the purpose that the pastor is intended to administer the ordinances. Qualifications to pastor and qualifications to be an administrator are intimately related. While God calls men to preach in different capacities (see Ephesians 4:11-12) it is apparent the pastor is always intended to administer the ordinances. This is why those qualifications set down in 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are considered the law of God for His Churches to follow when selecting and ordaining their pastors. When this law is overlooked, no authority on earth could demand that God recognize the ordination as scriptural or the ordinances such a one administers as valid. Some may say that Church authority makes all ordinations valid. Would you say Hospital authority makes valid operations performed on your loved one by an unqualified doctor? Those with authority only have the right to carry out their authority in accordance with the law which governs their practice.

Sometimes people ask why the Holy Spirit directed the men He directed to perform baptism as we read in Acts chapters 8 and 9. The Holy Spirit directly sent Ananias who baptized Paul. We sometimes are asked why the Holy Spirit chose him. What did the Spirit see in Ananias that caused the Holy Spirit to direct him as He did? We get the answer to that question when we read the qualifications the same Holy Spirit inspired in 1st Tim 3 and Tit 1. The Holy Spirit directed a man who was qualified. We know not all the details of the ministry in which Ananias was involved. However, we do know what qualifications God has set down for those who serve as administrators. God has said that He is no respecter of persons. Though men be unequal in their dealings, it is not so with God. Though a man may forget why he did a certain thing in the past, God always remembers and acts consistently.

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STUDY COURSE AVAILABLE

Brother Michael Brawner has developed a study course on Baptist Distinctives. The course allows participants to study at their own pace. Each lesson includes an audio lecture, review questions, and an optional written assignment. A text book is also available for an in-depth study. For more information, please contact Brother Brawner at mike6154488802@gmail.com.

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In summary, this article is intended to teach that all the authority to administer scriptural baptism resides in the Lord's Church. The authority is in no wise in the pastor. However, the Church needs a man who meets the qualifications set down in the New Testament in order to administer the ordinances and them be scriptural. Otherwise, it sets out to establish its own laws and acts as if God is required to uphold them. Let's all be thankful for the great numbers of followers of the Lord Jesus Christ who still acknowledge and practice what has been stated here. May God help us to continue to do so without fear until His return.

CHURCH COVENANT

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interactions with other members, do they see the love of God in us?

We agree "to strive for the advancement" of our church. In other words, we should make great effort to see the church grow. The Lord has sent us out into the world saying, "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23. *Highways and hedges* suggest going to great lengths for God's cause.

We agree "to sustain [the church's] worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines." Simply put, we should attend the church's worship services and contribute to them, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves." Heb. 10:25. We should participate in the ordinances of the church. We should encourage errant members and "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Gal. 5:1. We should know and teach the doctrines (beliefs) of the church to the coming generation.

We agree "to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel." Namely, we should contribute financially

to the causes supported by the church, knowing "God loveth a cheerful giver." 2 Co. 9:7.

We agree "to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children" In other words, we should practice religion in our homes. We should pray as a family. We should promote godliness within it. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deu. 6:7.

We agree "to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment." Namely, we should live Christian lives outside the confines of the church house. While we are in the world, we should live like we are "not of the world." John 17:16.

We agree "to avoid tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger." Simply put, we should avoid all gossip, slander, and cursing, considering the words of the apostle, "But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." James 3:8-10.

We agree "to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage." We should never consume alcoholic beverages or intoxicating drugs. And we should not partake in or profit from the sale of alcohol. Mind altering substances hinder our Lord's service. As such, Moses commanded the priesthood "do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation..." Lev. 10:9.

We agree "to watch over one another... remember each other in prayer...aid each other...be slow to take offense...ready for reconciliation." We should have "fervent charity among ourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8.

Church covenants are not inspired scripture. When scripturally based, they are a good summary of our commitment and responsibilities as church members. If we have a church covenant, let us "carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word." Our churches, our homes, and our communities will benefit from it.

BROWN'S CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

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