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#### Core Seminar

#### Membership Matters

**Session 2: Church Covenant**

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***Teaching Suggestions from Jamie:***

*This teaching guide has two pieces: an outline of the class, and a word-for-word manuscript. If you would like to edit this to suit your own style, feel free. But please do keep two things in mind: (1) you should not delete any topics covered in this guide; and (2) be careful not to add too much or else you may well run out of time (and end up omitting or skimming over important topics that will not appear elsewhere in the Membership Matters course).*

*You’ll notice the time markers to the left in both the outline and manuscript versions to help you manage your time. The left number in bold is for Sunday morning; the right number is for Friday night.*

*Note: the number preceding each section of the covenant in the manuscript version refers to the starting line number for that section.*

**Outline Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first and last name, location of where they live.

***9:50*** */ 8:10*

**Background**

* Hebrews 10 as a blueprint for our life together as a church
* Context: Jesus is exalted as the ultimate hope for all people. The fulfillment of OT, final sacrifice, perfect high priest, etc.
* In him we can be forgiven of our sin as we repent and believe.
* If there is final forgiveness of sins and perfect union with God, what should we do? Verse 23:

“23Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

* We should persevere until the end. How do we do that? Read into verse 24:

“24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

* Christian life is fundamentally corporate. “stir up one another” “encouraging one another”
* We like “community” but so often despise “commitment.” But they are one and the same.
* Which brings us to our *Church Covenant*: the summary of the commitments to each other that the Bible calls us to make.
	+ Dates back to 1878 when our church first came into existence
	+ Original covenant and signatures hang on the back of the West Hall

**Any questions?**

***9:59*** */ 8:19*

Line 1: Introduction

* This covenant is to be made by Christians only (“repent and believe”)
* Made by baptized Christians
* Can only be kept with God’s help (“relying on his gracious aid”)

Line 6

* Quoting Ephesians 4:1-3 “1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
* Unity doesn’t just happen . . . because churches are made up of sinners.
* We commit to not talk behind each other’s backs, to forgive each other, to give each other the benefit of the doubt, to surrender our preferences for the good of others, to be careful with each other’s reputations. We don’t major on minor issues; we are careful how we speak publicly in members meetings; we pray for one another and put on love at all times.

Line 8

* How do we love each other? Does that mean we all have sweet feelings toward one another? Well, that feeling may well be there, but biblical love is more steadfast than that.
	+ Affectionate care: practical care for each other’s physical and spiritual needs
	+ Watchful: protecting each other from sin and mistakes
	+ Admonishing and entreating one another: it is a loving thing to speak to me when I am struggling in sin

Line 12

* Hebrews 10:23-25. We are commanded to meet together regularly. Of course things come up . . . but meeting together should be normal.
* When someone stops going to church, it’s generally either an indication that they’re in sin or are about to be.
* If you’re struggling, the *last* thing you should do is to avoid church.

Line 15

* Commitment to help each other raise our children.
* Commitment to evangelize—and to help each other do so.

***10:08*** */ 8:28*

Line 19

* We live in a world that is full of envy, jealousy, and greed . . . but as a church, we are called to be very different.
* Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”
* Examples of rejoicing with those who rejoice and of weeping with those who weep.
* We are not designed to go through difficulty and sorrow alone.

Line 22

* We live *in* the world, but we’re not to be *of* the world.
* We need encouragement to say “no” to the world, to seek satisfaction only in Christ.
* We too often feel right at home in this world; we need each other to remember where home really is.

Line 26

* By becoming a member here, you commit to uphold the Gospel witness in this church
	+ Through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
	+ Through church discipline.
	+ Through giving faithfully and sacrificially of our finances. (**Article in handout**)
* If you join our church, you’ll own a part of the responsibility for all that goes on here – worship, evangelism, doctrine, relief of the poor and much more.

***10:12*** */ 8:32*

I mentioned the practice of church discipline. Let me say a bit more about that. Church discipline is the removal of an individual from our membership because of unrepentant sin in their lives. Essentially what is happening is that they are professing with their mouths to be in Christ, but their lives give evidence to the contrary. So out of love for them and for the reputation of Christ, we are making it clear to them, to us, and to the world around us, that this life they are living is not representative of a Christian’s. They are welcome to attend here, but they may not call themselves a member of our church, and they may not take the Lord’s supper with us. Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 are two chapters in the Bible that speak of this in greater detail—and you’ll see a **one-page explanation of church discipline in your handout**.

Now, there are lots of sins that church discipline doesn’t apply to. It’s not for sin generally—that would include all of us, as churches are only for sinners. Rather, church discipline is for *unrepentant* sin. And there are lots of sins that we just can’t know about. We can’t discipline you for being prideful, for example.

But if you persist in sin that is serious, clear to others, and unrepentant—such as unrepentant tax evasion, for example, or persistent refusal to attend a church, or joining a church that endorses homosexuality—we will remove you from our membership as an act of discipline.

Line 31

* When you move from the church, RESIGN YOUR MEMBERSHIP!! (and tell us which church you’re planning on joining).

Line 34

* The benediction with which we close most of our services.
* 2 Corinthians 13:14.

**Conclusion**

* How do we persevere? In community.
* Community is built of relationships that require commitment; our commitment to each other as a church begins with the promises of this church covenant.

**Manuscript Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first and last name, location of where they live.

***9:50*** */ 8:10*

**Background**

In Hebrews chapter 10 we see a blueprint for what our life as a church should look like, and what its purpose is. To give you some context: throughout the book of Hebrews, Jesus is exalted as the ultimate hope of all people. He’s the fulfillment of the Old Testament, He’s the final sacrifice for sins, He’s the resurrected Lord, He’s the high priest who intercedes for God’s people, He’s the One who’s coming soon to give final rest to those who trust in Him. In light of all this, people are called to repent of their sins and trust in Christ. When they do, they’re forgiven of their sin and united with Christ and with His people. And that brings us to verse 23 of chapter 10. If this has in fact happened, if there *is* final forgiveness of sins and perfect union with God, what should we do? Verse 23:

“23Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

If we’ve encountered the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ, our call is to persevere until the end. You see, profession of faith in Christ isn’t just a one-time thing . . . it’s a daily reality. Every day, we need to battle against the pull of the world that calls us to forsake Jesus and give into sin. Every day, we need to remind ourselves of the truth of Christ’s claims and of the reality of the hope he offers to us. So how do we do that? Well, God’s given us the gifts of his Spirit and his Word—and he’s promised that if we are truly in Christ, “no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:28). But what’s the normal way that God causes us to persevere? Read ahead into verse 24:

“24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

“Not neglecting to meet together.” What does the author have in mind? The universal church? No: someday we will all be together, but not yet. He has in mind Christians meeting together in local churches. How do we remain faithful to the end? Through our life together as a church. Something that is fundamentally corporate, not just about me and Jesus. And while this gathering together is certainly not less than showing up at church on a regular basis, it’s much, much more. We are to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” We are to keep “encouraging one another.” And the love that these Christians had for each other was earth-shattering. Later on in the chapter we read that they were “partners” with those who were “exposed to reproach and affliction” for the sake of the gospel. We remain faithful through good times and bad by forming in our local church a network of deep relationships, fueled by the word of God, that encourage us, and exhort us, and spur us on to forsake worldliness and expend every ounce of breath for the kingdom of God.

Now, the very nature of relationships is that they require commitment to flourish. It seems that so often today, we talk a lot about “community” but are somewhat allergic to “commitment.” But the Bible is clear that they’re two sides of the same coin—and our own experience should echo that. What we see here in Hebrews 10 is a little bit of what commitment should look like within the local church. That’s why you’ll hear a lot of talk at our church about the importance of “membership.” The term “member” simply comes from how the apostle Paul talks about being part of a local church. We are all “members” of the body of Christ.

Now, when you decide to become a member of a church, you’re basically taking all the commitments that the Bible calls you to make to other Christians—like the commitment to meet together regularly, to encourage, to spur on, that we see in Hebrews 10—you’re taking all those commitments and making it clear that you’re making them to *this* particular group of Christians. The Christians who gather at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

And that brings us to our church covenant, because this document is a summary of the commitments we make to each other when we join this church. You won’t find this covenant word-for-word in the Bible—because like our statement of faith is a *summary* of what the Bible tells us to believe, this covenant is a *summary* of how the Bible calls us to live together. Though you’ll recognize most of the phrases as direct quotations from Scripture. Our covenant dates back to 1878 when our church began. The very first thing that those believers did when they became a church was to agree on a Statement of Faith and a Church Covenant. You can see the original covenant and the signatures of the original members hanging on the back of the West Hall.

So in order to join our church, we ask that you sign the church covenant. You’re formalizing the commitment that you’re making to the other members of this church; and you’re promising that you’ll open up your life so that we in turn can hold up our end of this covenant. In short, you’re promising with God’s help to obey all that he’s commanded you about living life together in community with other believers.

**Any questions about the general concept of a church covenant before we dive into the document itself?**

***9:59*** */ 8:19*

**The Covenant**

You can divide the covenant into three parts:

• The introduction

• The promises (which is the bulk of the document)

• The benediction

We’ll start in line 1 with *The Introduction:*

*Having, as we trust, been brought by Divine Grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up ourselves to Him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.*

Three things to note in this first paragraph:

* First, the covenant is to be made by Christians only. On line 1 you see Jesus’ words from the opening verses of Mark: this covenant is to be made by those who “repent and believe” in Jesus Christ.
* Second, the covenant is to be made by baptized Christians. It is to be made by those who have been baptized upon their “profession of faith” (line 2).
* Third, the covenant can only be kept with God’s help. End of line 3 reads, “relying on His gracious aid…” Any ability we have to fulfill the promises of this covenant is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit, not to us! We should have no reason to be proud of spiritual success in our lives. God gets all the credit and all the glory.

*The Commitments*

And then we get to the specific things we’re committing to do.

*6: “We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

This line is a direct quote from Ephesians 4:1-3 where Paul says “1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We’re called to work for unity because unity doesn’t just happen. Why not? Because we’re a bunch of sinners…and when you bring sinners together, they naturally divide, nit-pick, and selfishly exalt their rights and preferences.

So, as members of this church we commit to praying for and working for unity. We commit to not talk behind each other’s backs, to forgive each other, to give each other the benefit of the doubt, to surrender our preferences and opinions for the good of others and the glory of Christ, to be careful with each other’s reputations. This means we take time to listen to each other and consider each other’s desires as we run this race together seeking to fulfill the Great Commission Christ has called us to. It means not majoring on minor issues; it means being careful how we speak publicly in members meetings; it means praying for one another and putting on love at all times.

*8: “We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian Church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.”*

How do we love each other? Does that mean we all have sweet feelings toward one another? Well, that feeling may well be there, but biblical love is deeper than that. It’s an affectionate care: practical love that makes meals, visits the sick, and prays for each other. It’s a watchful love: looking out to protect each other from sin and mistakes. And it is a love guarded and guided by truth. This means that we love each other by admonishing and entreating each other when we sin. Now, in our day, some would say that for you to speak truth into my life or to call me out when I’m in sin is close-minded, judgmental and unloving . . . I’m telling you that’s not true. The most loving thing you can do for me if I’m struggling in sin is to come and speak with me about it. A church is a place where we can at the same time speak hard truths *and* be filled with grace.

*12: “We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.”*

As we saw in Hebrews 10:23-25 we’re commanded in Scripture to meet together regularly. This is why when we become members here we commit to assembling each Sunday morning (and each Sunday evening) to learn God’s Word, to sing God’s praises and to pray to God together. By assembling together each week we take the first step toward growing in unity with each other. So as a member, we expect you to come together regularly on Sundays to worship…do people have vacations? Do things come up?...yes, but the normal thing we do on Sunday is to get together.

In my experience, when someone stops assembling with other believers on a regular basis it usually reflects one of two things: either they’re in sin or they’re about to be. Sin keeps us from meeting together, but meeting together helps us to fight against sin. So when you’re struggling with sin, you should stay away from here until you’ve cleaned up your act, right? No! That’s a lie of Satan. The *last* thing you should do when you’re struggling is to stay away from one of the most powerful means God has given you to fight for fellowship with him. Don’t forsake assembling with the church.

*15: “We will endeavor to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.”*

Some of us are parents; some aren’t. But we’re all committing to help those that are bring up their children as Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6 call us to. All of us have unsaved loved ones—be they family or friends. We commit to make Christ known to them—praying for them, praying for each other’s witness, and encouraging each other in the great task of evangelism.

***10:08*** */ 8:28*

*19: “We will rejoice at each other’s happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other’s burdens and sorrows.”*

We live in a world that’s full of envy, jealousy, and greed . . . but as a church, we’re called to be different. Because we love each other and have compassion and sympathy for each other, we are called in Romans 12:15 to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” That means that as a church family, we rejoice when others get pregnant, even if that’s not been possible for us. It means that when someone else gets a promotion and we would give almost anything to just have a job, we rejoice. We are called to see other’s happiness and praise God for it.

We’re also called to weep with those who weep. We live in a world where there is death, cancer, divorce, friends forsaking each other…we live in a fallen world. As a church family, we’re called in Galatians 6:2 to “bear one another’s burdens.” We’re not designed to go through difficulty and sorrow alone and God ministers to us through His people in times of trouble. (Note: Give an example of seeing someone bear a burden or sorrow (e.g. Kalenaks).

*22: “We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.”*

We live *in* the world, but we’re not to be *of* the world. We need encouragement to stay to the narrow path of righteousness and say “no” to the world. We need encouragement to seek satisfaction only in Christ and not in the things of this world. Scripture calls us aliens, but we too often feel right at home. Covenanting with other believers reminds us of our status as pilgrims and sojourners.

*26: “We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines. We will 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.”*

By becoming a member here, you commit, alongside everyone else, to uphold the Gospel witness in this church.

* We uphold the Gospel witness here through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
* We uphold the Gospel witness here through church discipline.
* We uphold the Gospel witness here through giving faithfully and sacrificially of our finances. (regular offering, benevolence fund). You’ll see a paper in your handout explaining more about this biblical command for all Christians to give financially to their local churches as they are able.

 If you join our church, you’ll own a part of the responsibility for all that goes on here – worship, evangelism, doctrine, relief of the poor and much more.

***10:12*** */ 8:32*

I mentioned the practice of church discipline. Let me say a bit more about that. Church discipline is the removal of an individual from our membership because of unrepentant sin in their lives. Essentially what’s happening is that they are professing with their mouths to be in Christ, but their lives give evidence to the contrary. So out of love for them and for the reputation of Christ, we are making it clear to them, to us, and to the world around us, that this life they’re living is not representative of a Christian’s. They are welcome to attend here, but they may not call themselves a member of our church, and they may not take the Lord’s supper with us. Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 are two chapters in the Bible that speak of this in greater detail—and you’ll see a one-page explanation of church discipline in your booklet.

Now, there are lots of sins that church discipline doesn’t apply to. It’s not for sin generally—that would include all of us, as churches are only for sinners. Rather, church discipline is for *unrepentant* sin. And there are lots of sins that we just can’t know about. We can’t discipline you for being prideful, for example.

But if you persist in sin that is serious, clear to others, and unrepentant—such as unrepentant tax evasion, for example, or persistent refusal to attend a church, or joining a church that endorses homosexuality—we will remove you from our membership as an act of discipline.

*31: “We will, when we move from this place, 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.”*

Membership isn’t about affection for one particular group of Christians. It’s about unity with the body of Christians God has physically placed around you. So when you leave here—either because you’ve left the area or feel that you can grow better at another local church—resign your membership. I can’t tell you how many dozens of hours the church staff spend trying to figure out what happened to people who just disappeared. We’re worried for them. What’s happened? Then after months of wondering, they finally return our e-mail. “Sorry—I moved to Alabama and I’ve joined a church there.” Don’t do that!! When you move, resign your membership and tell us what church you intend to join. It’s how you can keep this covenant with us.

The Benediction

*34: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.”*

These words are from the last verse of 2 Corinthians. They conclude most services of our church. If you are in Christ, you know the grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This benediction is a prayer for still more.

**Conclusion**

So what does it look like to persevere in Christ? It means doing that in community with other believers where strong relationships allow them to know and encourage you and you to know and encourage them. Relationships are built on commitment, and our commitment to each other as a church begins with the promises of this church covenant. Promises you make not just to people with the same background as you, or in the same profession, or people to whom you have a natural affinity. But promises you make to all of God’s children who assemble here as part of our church. And in that we are spurred on and our Lord is glorified.

Let’s pray.