

5 Reasons to Say "No!" to a Church Covenant

"But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all ... All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one" Matthew 5:34-37.

Village Church in Dallas, Texas, placed a member named Karen Root under church discipline because she annulled her marriage with a confessed child pornographer. A letter Village Church elders sent to members gave their logic for placing Karen under church discipline. "...Karen filed for an immediate annulment of her marriage to Jordan apart from the counsel of the church... **(by) signing the Membership Covenant, a member agrees ... to receive our care...**" Karen had respectfully requested withdrawal of membership from Village Church, but the elders wouldn't allow it because she had not sought their counsel. She refused to come "under their care," so they put Karen under discipline. No Village Church member under discipline, wrote Village church authorities, can "withdraw" from membership.

Village Church leaders--regardless of the vocal criticism they receive--believed they were men of integrity. They were, in their minds, fulfilling their pastoral role and abiding by the church covenant they had demanded everyone sign before they became members. But these church elders are guilty of *Fraudulent Authority*. They believe spiritual formation is given to mere men instead of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the phrases that the prospective member must read and then sign at Village Church.

I understand the importance of submission to church leadership.

I will submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church.

I will agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at The Village Church before.

The premise of this lesson is that the major problem in modern evangelical Christianity is the authoritarianism of evangelical leaders. I have sought to explain how pastors/elders "twist the Scriptures" and demand "obedience and submission" to this alleged authority. Jesus tells us that that true 'spiritual leaders' are only servants, never masters. Evangelical leaders seem not to be listening to Jesus.

There are 5 reasons why I would never sign a church membership covenant to become a member.

1. A church covenant makes the Holy Spirit irrelevant in my life.

We are called in Scripture to be led "by the Spirit." Though there is counsel in the wisdom of many, when I sign a church covenant, I abdicate my right to hear from the Spirit myself. When Karen Root resigned her membership from Village, she stated "I have sought the Lord diligently and several godly people I trust..." That wasn't good enough for Village elders; Karen didn't seek them out. A church covenant fetters one's ability to seek the Spirit's wisdom and advice from godly people other than the elders and pastors of the church that demanded you to sign.

2. A church covenant replaces my one true Mediator with inferior mediators.

I have only One High Priest who stands between me and God - Jesus, the Son of God - and anyone who comes between me and Jesus as I walk by His counsel and His wisdom is a detriment to my growth. A true servant in the Kingdom will only and always point me to Jesus Christ for my marching orders and

will never demand that I accept their orders as from God. When I sign a church covenant, I'm in essence handing over the authority of Jesus Christ in my life to mere men.

3. A church covenant makes the institutional church equivalent to the Kingdom of God.

A 501c-3 non-profit institutional church plays an important role in the Kingdom of God, but the local church is not the kingdom of God. Anyone who knows history understands that institutional churches who demand spiritual authority over individual believers have wrongly placed their institution on par with God's Kingdom.

For example, the great 17th century Baptist hymn writer and theologian Benjamin Keach decided to write a book for children containing evangelical truth. Authorities of the Church of England sought to execute him for writing that infant baptism was not biblical.

On what basis could the Church of England kill Benjamin Keach?

Answer: The same basis Village Church can consign Karen Root to church discipline. Leaders of the 17th century Church of England and the 21st century Village Church both believe their institution is equivalent to the Kingdom of God. Their leaders falsely believe that they hold the keys of life and death and of heaven and hell. It isn't so. Don't sign a covenant and perpetuate this dangerous lie.

4. A church covenant by its nature is designed to protect an authoritarian structure.

When Christians sign a church covenant that demands submission to elders/pastors, he or she is enabling that institutional church to maintain an authoritarian structure. Rather than the weak and wounded sheep being the focus of attention within the church, most modern covenants are written with phrases that seem intent on bringing church members into "submission to church authorities."

Quickly scan any church covenant. If "submission to church elders" is anywhere found, then know the covenant is designed to keep control of members and maintain the authority of the leaders. Paul Burleson points out that any institutional church more concerned with supporting their authoritarian system of control than healing their wounded members is sending signals of weak spiritual leadership. Jesus said that the world uses titles, positions of honor, and seeks to "exercise authority over those they rule," but "this should never be the case among His followers" (Mark 10:35-45).

5. A church covenant requires something more than a simple "Yes" or "No."

Jesus said that anything you have to do that goes beyond your simple words of "Yes" and "No" is from the "evil one" (Matthew 5:37). When I join a church, I will forever refuse to sign any document, whether it be a "tithing card," or "a membership covenant," or any other document that requires a vow from me regarding my future performance or activity. In fact, if I ever attend a church that requires such a thing, I will refuse to join on the basis of a principle. I will live freely, speak with integrity, and rest in the simplicity of following Jesus and living by the Spirit. Written vows will not fetter me to a church that is seeking to protect their authority over me.

I need no covenant to guarantee that God will finish the work He's begun in me.