

Harmony Baptist Church

Membership Covenant

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The Harmony Baptist Church (HBC) membership covenant is birthed out of our love for the church body and its individual members whom we hope will experience the fullness of joy which is found in the presence of the Lord. The primary purpose of this covenant is to serve as a teaching document with three functions:

1. To clarify the biblical obligations and expectations for both the elders of HBC and the individual members to HBC body.
2. To establish teaching and doctrinal directives for the HBC body.
3. To serve as a tool for reflection and growth toward godliness.

Each of these functions is in accordance with the document's overall vision to provide an accessible explanation of the Scriptures in the hopes that HBC would grow in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. HBC membership covenant is comprised of a section on the Church, the nature of covenants, a statement of basic belief, a statement of biblical doctrine, the obligations of HBC elders to the HBC body, and the obligations of members to the HBC body.

What is the Church?

The church exists for the display of the glory of God because all things exist for his glory. Those of us who trust in and follow Jesus are caught up in something much bigger than ourselves. We have graciously been invited into God's redemptive purposes in the world.

Since the beginning, God has been creating and calling for His people for the display of His glory in a grand narrative of redemption and reconciliation. Though creation now suffers the curse of Genesis 3, the gospel is the means by which the world is being made right. The gospel also carries with it the promise of the ultimate renewal, a restoration even more glorious than Eden, and thus believers eagerly anticipate the return of Christ. The Church Universal (i.e. all believers, everywhere) is the means by which God is fulfilling His purposes in the world (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). The Church Universal is being used to write God's beautiful and dramatic story of redemption and reconciliation. In light of this reality, the opportunity to join a local church body (i.e. a particular group of believers in a particular locale) is much more than a commitment to a consistent attendance or active involvement in community. It is also a sacred call to be involved in the redemptive work of our sovereign God to push back the darkness of a fallen world through the power of the Holy Spirit with the light of His Son, Jesus Christ. The church is the gathering of the redeemed, the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), the bride of Christ (Revelations 21:2, 9), and the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of many members within the same body. Just as a human body relies upon mutual dependence of individual members for proper functioning, so the body of Christ requires sacrificial and responsible service by its individual members. As the Scriptures say, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:21). Likewise, a member of the church cannot say to another member that he or she is unnecessary. We all have gifts that differ according to the gracious provision of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:3-8). Contrary to the beliefs of our culture, we need each other.

Membership at HBC is participation in a family, a microcosm of the universal household of God. All members are united to Christ and thus to each other. Unity within the church is expressed in love for God and a love for others, both those within the family, a microcosm of the universal household of God. All members are united to Christ and thus each other. Unity within the church is expressed in love for God and a love for others, both those within the family and those who are not. Because of the identification of Christ with His church, Christians are expected to display His gospel in a manner which is worthy of Him (Ephesians 4:1).

What is a covenant?

A covenant is generally defined as “a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.”¹ Within the Scriptures, we find a number of examples of covenants; some between God and man (Genesis 6, 9, 15; Ezekiel 20; Hosea 2; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 26), while others are solely between men (1 Samuel 18, 2 Samuel 5). Some covenants are unconditional, meaning that two or more parties obligate themselves in such a way that the obligation of each party is not dependent on the faithfulness of the other. In other words, there is a pledge to be faithful to the covenant regardless of the other person’s faithfulness. Other covenants are conditional, meaning that the obligation of one party is least in part dependent upon the faithfulness of the other. While God’s gracious covenant with the Church Universal is unconditional, the local church covenant itself is in part conditioned upon the faithfulness of each party. If at any time one of the parties, the individual member or corporate church body, fails in its obligations, the other party is freed from certain aspects of the covenant. The covenant of HBC contains many conditions that are merely general Christian obligations. For example, all Christians, whether members of HBC or elsewhere, are required to submit to the Scriptures, pursue holiness, steward resources, etc. Such requirements are universal obligations for the Christ-follower regardless of any failure on the part of the local church to live up to her covenant obligations.

If at any time an individual member feels as though the corporate church body is not remaining faithful to the requirements of the covenant, it is the responsibility of the individual member to lovingly and humbly express concerns to the leadership of the church. If the church elders are unwilling to change and pursue covenant faithfulness, then the church member is freed from his or her membership obligations and is encouraged to seek membership elsewhere given the church’s disobedience. In addition, certain circumstances may provide sufficient and righteous grounds to transfer membership elsewhere. While focusing primarily in language on the responsibilities between the individual parties, the corporate body, her elders, and her individual members, the covenant is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to His glory and the good of the body and bride of His Son.

Biblical Obligations of the HBC Elders to the Body of HBC

As shepherds and overseers of a local church, elders are entrusted with protecting, leading, equipping, and caring for the corporate church body and her individual members. The following is a rather comprehensive overview of the requirements for elders as spelled out in the Scriptures.

The elders covenant...

1. To nominate elders and deacons (including staff members who serve in these offices) according to the criteria assigned (1 Timothy 3: 1-13; Titus 1: 5-9; 1 Peter 5: 1-4).
2. To prayerfully seek God’s will for our church community and steward her resources to the best of our ability based on our study of the Scriptures and following the Spirit (Acts 20: 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
3. To care for the church and seek her growth in grace, truth, and love (Matthew 28: 16-20; Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 1:28; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5: 1-4).

¹ Inc Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Includes Index., 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993)

4. To provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20: 27-28; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4: 1-5; Titus 2:1).
5. To equip the members of the church for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4: 11-16).
6. To be on guard against false teachers and teachings (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20: 28-31; 1 Timothy 1: 3-7; 1 John 4:1).
7. To lovingly exercise discipline when necessary, for the glory of God, the good of the one disciplined and the health of the church as a whole (Matthew 18: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1; James 5: 19-20).
8. To set an example and join members in fulfilling the obligations of church membership stated below (Philippians 2:17; 1 Timothy 4: 12; Titus 2: 7-8; 1 Peter 5:3).

Biblical Obligations of the Members to the HBC Body

As those who have experienced the grace of a life changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to reflect the character of Christ through the pursuit of certain attitudes and actions and the rejection of others. The Scriptures refer to this reality as “living by the Spirit” (Romans 8). The requirements of this membership covenant are in no way intended as an addition to the biblical obligations of a believer. Rather, this document functions primarily as an accessible, yet non-exhaustive, explanation of what the Scriptures teach about the obedience that faith produces.

I covenant...

1. To submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3: 14-17; 2 Peter 1: 19-21).
2. To pursue the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines (Like 18:1; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27; Ephesians 5: 1-21; 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-22).
3. To follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - a. By being baptized after my conversion
 - b. By regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through communion
4. To regularly participate in the life of HBC by attending weekly services, engaging in biblical community and serving those within and outside of this church (Acts 2: 42-47; Hebrews 10: 23-25; Titus 3: 14).
5. To steward the resources God has given me, including time, talents, spiritual gifts, and finances. This includes regular financial giving, service, and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (Matthew 25: 14-30; Romans 12: 1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Peter 4: 10-11).
6. By God’s grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 Peter 4: 1-3). Believers should strive to put certain attitudes and actions to death, while stirring and stimulating love and good deeds through the Spirit. Below are a few examples of actions addressed in the Scriptures:
 - a. I will practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within a heterosexual and monogamous marriage. Complete chastity and fidelity means, among other things, that regardless of my marital status, I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, premarital sex and pornography (Romans 13:

- 11-14; 1 Corinthians 6: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 10:8; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8; Hebrews 13:4).
- b. I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at HBC before pursuing divorce from my spouse (Matthew 19: 1-12; Mark 10: 1-12; Luke 16: 18; 1 Corinthians 7: 10-11; for the role of the church in the process of divorce, see Paul's concern for the resolution of legal matters within the assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 6).
 - c. I will refrain from illegal drug use, drunkenness, gossip, and other sinful behavior as the Bible dictates (Romans 1: 28-32; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5: 19-21; Ephesians 5: 18; James 3: 3-18).
7. To take seriously the responsibility of Christian freedom, especially actions or situations that could present a stumbling block to another (1 Corinthians 8: 1-13; Romans 14: 14-23).
 8. To submit to the discipline of God through His Holy Spirit by:
 - a. Following the biblical procedures for church discipline where sin is evident in another– the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration.
 - b. Receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers (Psalm 141: 5; Matthew 18: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 5: 9-13; Hebrews 12: 5-11).
 - c. Submitting to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church and will be diligent to strive for unity and peace within the Church (Ephesians 4: 1-3; Hebrews 13: 17; 1 Peter 5: 5).
 9. To do the following when I sin:
 - a. Confess my sin to God and fellow believers.
 - b. Repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Romans 8: 13; Colossians 3: 5; James 5: 16; 1 John 1: 6-10).

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