

The Covenantal Backbone

Understanding the Nature of Our Relationships (The Covenantal Nature of National Relationships)

1. Israel is the primary biblical example.
 - a. Israel was founded upon a national covenant.

 - b. The people of Israel were bound together as family (cf. Deut. 10:9; 13:12-15; 15:7, etc.)

2. Submission to governing authorities implies a bond of mutual duties:
 - a. Romans 13:1-7

 - b. 1 Peter 2:13-15

3. Relationships formed by covenant form the strongest bonds and suggest the best model.
 - a. Covenants bind people to one other relationally and not merely for personal benefit.

 - b. Covenants place duties upon leaders that are related to protection and provision and that mitigate self-serving leadership.

 - c. Covenants place duties upon the citizens that promote unity and mutual care and that prevent selfishness.

4. U.S. citizenship is predicated on a covenantal model.
 - a. Citizenship is granted on the basis of birth and automatically obligates individuals to shared duties:
 - i. Military service (MSO)
 - ii. Jury duty

 - b. Government representatives take an oath of office that involves duties and that requires witnesses.

 - c. Naturalized citizens are required to take the following oath in the presence of witnesses:

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."

Some follow-up instruction regarding the covenantal nature of the local church...

1. Foundational beliefs regarding the local church (premises upon which we operate):
 - a. The Lord has not left us without instruction in respect to the nature of local church relationships and to the ordering of the local church.
 - i. 1 Timothy, esp. chapters 3 and 5
 - ii. Titus, esp. chapter 1
 - iii. 1 Peter 5:1-3; Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 14:23-28; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12, etc.
 - b. Local churches are responsible for the protection of and propagation of pure doctrine.
 - i. Galatians, esp. chapters 1 and 3
 - ii. 1 Timothy 3:14-16
 - iii. 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:15, 24-25; 3:16 through 4:5
 - c. Local churches are responsible for the doctrinal formation and shepherding care of members (local churches are the Lord's *primary* instrument for the spiritual formation of believers).
 - i. 1 Peter 5:1-3
 - ii. Hebrews 13:17
 - iii. Titus 2:15; 3:10
 - iv. 1 Timothy 4:11 and 5:7
 - v. Matthew 18:12-17; Galatians 6:1-2
2. What are some implications that flow from these statements?
 - a. Evangelism that does not connect converts to a local church will be anemic at best because it communicates that a person can be united to Christ without being united to His body—it fails to offer the whole Christ to the unbeliever.
 - b. Groups that function independently of local church authority are without *proper* protection and accountability both in respect to doctrine and leadership qualifications.
 - c. Community discipleship groups that bring together members of various churches for ongoing biblical study usurp the authority of local churches to ensure sound doctrine as well as the responsibility of local churches to disciple their own members and will likely end up teaching cross-doctrinally with the churches represented.

Related Questions for Consideration

- Who is responsible to ensure that the content of instruction is biblical/doctrinally pure?
- Should local church leaders know the content of the instruction its members are receiving, and do they have responsibility to ensure that it is good teaching?
- When the instruction of a community group or ministry runs counter to the teaching of a local church, who has the responsibility to adjudicate? What responsibility does the local church have to correct the teaching, at least so far as its members are concerned?

