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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Church Covenant

OF THE PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCH, MEETING
IN THE HORSE FAIR, STONY STRATFORD, BUCKS.

WE whose names are underwritten do now declare, that we embrace the word of God as our only guide in matters of religion, and acknowledge no other authority whatever as binding upon the conscience. Having, we hope, found mercy at the hands of God, in delivering us from the power of darkness, and translating us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, we think and feel ourselves bound to walk in obedience to his divine commands. On looking into the sacred scripture, we find it was common in the first ages of Christianity for such as professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, voluntarily to unite together in Christian societies, called in the New Testament, Churches. Their ends in so doing were, to honour God and promote their own spiritual edification. Having searched the written word, we trust, with a degree of diligence, in order that we may know how to act, as well as what to believe, and sought unto God by prayer for divine direction, we heartily approve of, and mean to follow their example. With a view to this, we now solemnly, in the presence of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, do mutually covenant and agree, in manner and form following.

1. To maintain and hold fast the important and fundamental truths of revelation. These we apprehend to be such as respect the natural and moral character of Jehovah, and the various relations he stands in to his rational creatures; the original purity but present depravity of human nature; the total moral inability and yet absolute inexcusableness of man as a guilty sinner before God; the perpetuity of a divine law, and the equity of its awful sanction; the infinite dignity of the Son of God in his original character as a divine person, possessed of all the perfections of Deity, and his all-sufficiency for the office of Mediator between God and Man, in consequence of the union of the divine and human natures in one person; the acceptance of our persons with, and the enjoyment of all good from God, through his mediation; the proper divinity and blessed agency of the holy Spirit in our regeneration, sanctification, and

consolation; in one word, that our full salvation, from its first cause to its final consummation, is a display of sovereign goodness accomplishing the gracious purposes of him, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, and known unto whom is the end from the beginning.

2. To seek by all proper means the good of the church with which we stand connected. To this end we engage to attend regularly, as far as we have opportunity, all seasons of public worship, church meetings, and meetings of prayer appointed by the church. When we are absent we will be ready to give an account why we were so, if required. We will diligently watch for the appearances of God's work in our congregation; and if we see any setting their faces Zion-ward, we will endeavour to instruct and encourage; and having hopeful evidence of the reality of God's work upon their souls, will lay before them the privileges they have a right unto, and the duties they ought to be found in, of following Christ in his Ordinances and Institutions. If called to the painful work of executing the penalties of Christ upon the breakers of the laws of his house, we will endeavour to exercise it in the spirit of the gospel, without respect of persons. In all questions that shall be debated at our church meetings, the brethren shall speak but one at a time; and if a difference in sentiment should take place, we will endeavour in brotherly love to weigh the matter fully and deliberately, and then put it to the vote in order that it may be determined by the majority. Also we engage that according to our ability, we will contribute our share towards defraying all necessary expenses attending the worship of God. We likewise promise to keep the secrets of the church, and not to expose its concerns to the world around.

3. To esteem our pastor highly in love for his work's sake. This we will endeavour to manifest by frequently and fervently praying for him; diligently attending on his ministry; encouraging his heart and strengthening his hands to the utmost of our power in the work of the Lord; freely consulting him as we have occasion and opportunity, respecting our spiritual affairs; treating him affectionately when present, and speaking respectfully of him when absent. As he is a man of like passions with others, we will endeavour to conceal and cover with a mantle of love, his weaknesses and imperfections; also to communicate unto him of our temporal good things, knowing that the Lord hath ordained that they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

4. To walk in love towards those with whom we stand connected in bonds of Christian fellowship. As the effect of this, we will pray much for one another. As we have oppor-

tunity, we will associate together for religious purposes. Those of us who are in more comfortable situations in life than some of our brethren, with regard to the good things of Providence, will administer as we have ability and see occasion, to their necessities. We will bear one another's burdens, sympathize with the afflicted in body and mind, so far as we know their case, under their trials; and as we see occasion, advise, caution, and encourage one another. We will watch over one another for good. We will studiously avoid giving or taking offences. Thus we will make it our study to fulfil the law of Christ.

5. To be particularly attentive to our station in life, and the peculiar duties incumbent on us in that situation. We who are husbands or wives will conscientiously discharge relative duties towards our respective yoke-fellows. We who are heads of families will maintain the daily worship of God in our houses, and endeavour to instruct those under our care, both by our words and actions. We who are children will be obedient to our parents in the Lord. We who are masters will [render] unto our servants that which is just and equal. We who are servants engage to be diligent and faithful, not acting with eye-service as men-pleasers, but with singleness of heart as unto God, knowing we have a Master in heaven. We will in our different places of abode, enquire what we can do for the good of the church to which we belong, and as far as we have ability, we will open or encourage the opening of a door wherever we can, for the preaching of the word, remembering that we ought to be as the salt of the earth.

6. To walk in a way and manner becoming the gospel, before them that are without, that we may by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of gainsayers. We will practise the strictest honesty in our dealings, and faithfulness in fulfilling all our promises. It shall be our study to represent a fair picture of religion before the eyes of the world in the whole of our conduct and conversation. We will abstain from all vain amusements and diversions, by which time would be foolishly spent, money wasted, our minds carnalized, and we exposed to many dangerous temptations. We engage in a special manner to sanctify the Lord's Day. In fine it shall be our study to keep our garments unspotted by the flesh, and walk as becometh saints.

7. To receive such, and only such, into communion with us as in a judgment of charity we think are born again; have been baptized according to the primitive mode of administering that ordinance, and profess their hearty approbation of, and subjection to, this our solemn Church Covenant.

These things, and whatever else may appear enjoined by the word of God, we promise in the strength of divine grace to

observe and practise. But knowing our insufficiency for any thing that is spiritually good, in and of ourselves, we look up to him who giveth power to the faint, rejoicing that in the Lord we have not only righteousness but strength. Hold thou us up, O Lord, and we shall be safe! Amen!

The above Covenant signed by us whose names follow, at our Church Meeting November 4th, 1790, and other convenient opportunities. John Goodrich, Pastor.

ABINGDON. This church was on Fifth Monarchy principles. When Pendarvis died in 1656, his body was brought up the Thames in a sugar-cask packed in sand, and services were held for a week. Cromwell was so fearful of an armed rising that he sent a regiment to keep order, and the colonel did at last order the funeral meetings to disperse. The burial was in Ock Street. A legacy of £50 enabled more land to be bought in 1670. At this time the leaders were captain Consolation Fox, William Stevenson, Simon Peck, of St. Helen's; in 1672 licences were taken for John Coombes and John Man to teach at the house of Katharine Peck. In 1678 and 1681 the church entertained an Association, to which delegates were sent from St. Albans, Hemel Hempstead, and Petty France in London. By 1689 John Tomkins was pastor, and a building arose by 1700. William Fuller came about 1705, and revived the cause in his forty years' ministry. Then came Daniel Turner from Reading in 1748, who by 1790 had associated John Evans. Much of this information was collected by Josiah Thompson, who adds the curious note that at Wantage there was a minister in 1713, William Jones, under whom that church declined, because he tried to discover the Longitude.

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RIDGMONT. Its church book opens in 1701, with W. Jarvis as pastor. Five years later he was succeeded by Samuel Butler, who died 1739, and William Davis, who died 1716; they were assisted by Ralph Baskerville and John Maurice. Baskerville was pastor in 1750, but three years later Joseph Loydal was called from Walgrave; he was excommunicated in 1766. William Pike followed next year, and the church became close Baptist in 1770. Such was the story gathered by Josiah Thompson in 1779.