

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ECCLESIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Church

One Body, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All

UNIT 4: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Gathered and Committed People of God

Lesson 11

REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The Baptist Distinctive, A Church of Believers Only

The church does not create her members through the administration of a rite. She receives them when the new covenant's Author has already created them through the regenerating work of His Spirit.

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."

Jeremiah 31:33–34, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Jeremiah 31:33–34; Acts 2:41, 47; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Matthew 13:24–30; Hebrews 8:10–12

"I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

1 Timothy 3:15, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

If Lesson 10 established that formal church membership is not optional, this lesson asks the more specific and more distinctively Baptist question: who should be admitted to that membership? The Baptist answer is the one that has distinguished the tradition from every form of territorial or inherited Christianity since the seventeenth century: only those who give credible evidence of genuine regeneration and saving faith. This is the doctrine of regenerate church membership, the conviction that the church's visible membership should consist, as far as human discernment allows, of those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, who understand and personally embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, and who give observable evidence of the repentance and faith that genuine regeneration produces. It is the most practically consequential of the Baptist distinctives, because it determines the basis on which every person is received into the covenant community, and the basis on which those already received are evaluated and, if necessary, disciplined.

The theological ground of regenerate church membership is the new covenant itself. Lesson 6 of this series examined in detail the Progressive Covenantal conviction that the new covenant, as Jeremiah 31:31–34 defines it, is distinguished from the Mosaic covenant by precisely this characteristic: all its members shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. The new covenant community is not a mixed population of the genuinely converted and those who have merely received a covenant sign; it is a community constituted by personal, Spirit-wrought knowledge of God. The Baptist doctrine of regenerate church membership is the ecclesiological entailment of this new covenant theology: if the new covenant community is defined by universal personal knowledge of God, then the visible church should be constituted of those who credibly demonstrate that they possess it. This is not a sectarian peculiarity; it is the direct institutional implication of the most fundamental characteristic of the covenant under which the church lives.

The pastoral history of the Baptist tradition makes clear that regenerate church membership has not always been practiced as carefully or as faithfully as the doctrine requires. The patterns of nominal membership, inadequate member reception processes, and reluctance to exercise church discipline that plague many contemporary Baptist churches are precisely the patterns that the doctrine of regenerate membership is designed to prevent. A Baptist church with a large roll of members who rarely attend, who have given no recent evidence of genuine spiritual life, and who are not being shepherded by elders who know them and are accountable for them has, in practical terms, abandoned the doctrine of regenerate membership even if it affirms it in principle. The doctrine is not self-executing; it requires the sustained, deliberate, pastorally costly labor of maintaining the integrity of the membership through careful reception and faithful discipline.

This lesson moves through the theological foundations of regenerate membership, the practical processes by which it is maintained, the honest acknowledgment of its limits, its distinction from the paedobaptist alternative, and its positive effects on the health and integrity of the local church. It engages the paedobaptist tradition with genuine respect, the Presbyterians and Reformed Anglicans who practice infant baptism are genuine brothers and sisters in Christ, and their tradition has produced some of the finest theological minds in the history of Protestantism. The Baptist disagreement with that tradition is not a disagreement about the gospel; it is a disagreement about the nature of the new covenant community and the basis on which its membership is constituted. That disagreement is real, consequential, and worth careful engagement.

I. REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DEFINED

The Ecclesiological Entailment of New Covenant Theology

A. The Definition and Its Theological Ground

Regenerate church membership is the conviction that the formal, covenantal membership of the local church should consist only of those who give credible evidence of genuine regeneration and saving faith. The word “regenerata”, the Latin root from which “regenerate” derives, means “born again,” and the doctrine takes its name directly from Christ’s own words to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The regenerate church is the church constituted by those who have been born again, not by water and blood but by the Spirit of God (John 3:5–8), not by natural descent or the decision of their parents or the administration of a sacramental rite, but by the sovereign, unilateral, transforming work of the Holy Spirit who blows where He wills.

The theological ground of this definition is the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34, which we have examined at length in Lesson 6. The new covenant’s most distinctive characteristic, the characteristic by which it is explicitly contrasted with the Mosaic covenant that preceded it, is that all its members shall know the Lord personally, from the least to the greatest. The old covenant community included within its boundaries many who had received the covenant sign (circumcision) but did not personally know the Lord, the mixed population of genuine believers and nominal covenant-keepers that constituted ethnic Israel. The new covenant community, as Jeremiah promises and the author of Hebrews confirms in Hebrews 8:10–12, is a community in which this mixed situation no longer obtains: every member of the new covenant, by definition, knows the Lord. The Baptist practice of admitting to membership only those who personally profess saving faith is the church’s institutional response to this new covenant promise.

The connection between regenerate membership and the doctrine of the new covenant is not merely a Baptist theological preference; it is a reading of the new covenant’s own self-definition that the New Testament consistently confirms. Paul’s argument in Romans 9:6, “for they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel”, establishes the principle that ethnic membership in the visible covenant community has never been equivalent to genuine spiritual membership in the community of the elect. The new covenant, by design and by promise, narrows the gap between visible and invisible membership: the community constituted by the new covenant is intended to be, as far as possible, coextensive with the community of the genuinely regenerate. The Baptist doctrine of regenerate church membership takes that intention with full seriousness and builds the church’s membership processes around it.

B. The Baptist Tradition’s Confession of This Doctrine

The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith articulates the doctrine of regenerate church membership in Chapter 26.2: “All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according to it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted.” The phrase “of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted” is the confession’s explicit

statement of the regenerate membership doctrine: the local church should consist of visible saints, those who profess the faith of the gospel and whose lives do not publicly contradict that profession.

The Confession's phrase "professing the faith of the gospel" is important: it establishes the basis of membership as profession, not guarantee. The Confession does not claim that the Baptist church contains only the genuinely elect; it claims that the Baptist church should contain only those who credibly profess the faith of the gospel. This is the distinction between the visible and invisible church that Lesson 4 of this series addressed in detail: the church's judgment about who is genuinely regenerate is based on the best available evidence of a credible profession, not on divine omniscience. The gap between the Baptist church's visible membership and the invisible community of the genuinely elect will always be imperfectly bridged; the doctrine of regenerate membership describes the standard toward which the church strives, not the perfection she achieves.

The Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century who produced this confession were not naive about the theological and practical challenges of maintaining a regenerate membership. They lived in a culture in which the Christian profession was socially and legally normative, in which the pressures on anyone seeking church membership to present a plausible-sounding conversion testimony were considerable, and in which the elders' capacity to distinguish genuine from false profession was inevitably limited. Their insistence on regenerate membership despite these challenges reflects a theological conviction that is worth recovering in any cultural context: that the church's integrity, the integrity of her ordinances, and the credibility of her witness all depend on the serious, persistent effort to constitute her membership of those who are genuinely the Lord's.

II. THE NEW COVENANT FOUNDATION

Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 as the Doctrinal Basis

A. *Jeremiah 31:31–34, The Defining Characteristic of the New Covenant Community*

The theological case for regenerate church membership begins, as all Baptist ecclesiology properly must, with the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31–34. We have examined this passage in detail in Lesson 6, but its direct relevance to the membership question warrants a more focused analysis here. The passage describes four characteristics of the new covenant that distinguish it from the Mosaic covenant it replaces. The fourth characteristic is the ground of the Baptist doctrine of regenerate membership: "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD." The contrast Jeremiah draws is between the old covenant community, in which the knowledge of God had to be communicated by instruction from person to person because not all members of the community personally knew the Lord, and the new covenant community, in which this situation is resolved because all its members know the Lord directly, personally, and without the need for human instruction to initiate the relationship.

The grammatical structure of Jeremiah 31:34 is unambiguous: the universal knowledge of God is both comprehensive ("they will all know Me") and graduated ("from the least of them to the greatest of them"). The comprehensiveness of the knowledge is what distinguishes the new covenant community from the old; the graduated nature of the knowledge acknowledges that there will be variation in the depth and maturity of the knowledge, but no variation in its presence. Every member of the new covenant community, from the newest believer to the most seasoned saint, personally knows the Lord. This is not a description of an ideal that the new

covenant community aspires to achieve; it is a description of the new covenant community's defining characteristic. Those who do not personally know the Lord are not members of the new covenant community.

The practical implication for the visible church is direct and unavoidable: the visible church should be constituted, as far as the limits of human discernment allow, of those who personally know the Lord. The administration of a covenant sign to those who do not yet personally know the Lord, or who have not yet given any evidence that they do, is to administer the new covenant's sign to those who do not yet bear the new covenant's defining reality. The Baptist conviction is not that the sign itself creates the reality (that would be sacramentalism); it is that the sign should follow the reality, not precede it. Baptism follows regeneration; membership follows baptism; the visible church is constituted by those who bear the new covenant reality that both the sign and the membership express.

B. Hebrews 8:6–13, The New Covenant's Present Reality

The author of Hebrews' extended quotation and application of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:6–13 is the most important New Testament confirmation of the Baptist reading of the new covenant's membership implications. The argument is that the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic covenant have been superseded because the new covenant, mediated by Christ, is established on better promises, including the promise of universal personal knowledge of God. Verse 10 restates Jeremiah's promise: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Verse 11 restates the universal knowledge characteristic: "And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them."

The author's use of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 8 is not primarily an argument about the church's membership practices; it is an argument about the superiority of Christ's high-priestly ministry and the consequent obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant. But the argument has direct ecclesiological implications that the author does not develop but that the Baptist tradition has consistently drawn out. The new covenant is not merely "better" in the sense of more impressive; it is better in the specific sense of addressing and resolving the fundamental problem of the old covenant's mixed membership. The old covenant's members did not all know the Lord; the new covenant's members do. The old covenant required mediation of the knowledge of God through human instruction within the covenant community; the new covenant provides that knowledge directly to every member through the Spirit's own work. The church that constitutes its membership on the new covenant basis will therefore constitute it of those who give evidence of the Spirit's work of regeneration and personal knowledge of God.

The Hebrews author's concluding observation in verse 13, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete", is the clinching argument. The old covenant, with its mixed membership of genuine believers and nominal covenant-keepers, has been rendered obsolete by the new covenant that Christ has established. The church, living under the new covenant, should not reconstitute itself on old covenant principles, including the old covenant principle that membership in the visible community is determined by birth into a covenant family and the administration of a covenant sign to those who have not yet personally believed. That is the old covenant's model, and the old covenant is obsolete. The church's membership model should correspond to the covenant she lives under: the new covenant, whose members all know the Lord.

III. THE PROCESS OF RECEPTION

Examining the Credible Profession of Faith

A. *The Components of a Credible Profession*

The doctrine of regenerate church membership does not require the church to claim divine omniscience about who is genuinely regenerate. It requires the church to exercise responsible human discernment about who gives a credible profession of genuine regeneration. A credible profession is one that is consistent, coherent, and corroborated, consistent with the biblical description of what regeneration produces, coherent in its understanding of the gospel and of the nature of saving faith, and corroborated by the observable pattern of the candidate's life. The standard of credibility is not infallibility; it is responsible pastoral discernment that takes the available evidence seriously and makes the best judgment it can on the basis of that evidence, knowing that the Lord alone knows those who are truly His (2 Timothy 2:19).

A credible profession involves, at minimum, three components. The first is a personal testimony of conversion: the candidate's own account of how and when and through what means the Lord brought him or her to genuine repentance and faith. The testimony need not be dramatic or emotionally intense; the Spirit works in a variety of ways, and the absence of a dramatic conversion experience is no evidence of the absence of genuine regeneration. But the testimony should be personal, not a recitation of theological propositions but an account of a genuine, specific, personally owned encounter with the claims of the gospel that produced genuine repentance toward God and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The testimony should also demonstrate that the candidate understands what it is that she is confessing: that she grasps the nature of sin, the justice of God, the person and work of Christ, and the basis of justification by grace alone through faith alone.

The second component is a credible understanding of the gospel. The candidate who cannot explain the gospel, who does not understand what sin is, who God is, what Christ has done, and how a sinner is justified before a holy God, has not given the church sufficient evidence that she has personally received the gospel she claims to profess. This is not an academic examination; it is a pastoral conversation designed to assess whether the candidate has genuinely understood and personally embraced the good news of Jesus Christ. The third component is an observable pattern of life consistent with regeneration: the candidate's conduct, relationships, and priorities should reflect, however imperfectly, the transforming work of the Spirit in his life. The church is not looking for perfection; she is looking for direction, the recognizable movement of a life toward Christ that genuine regeneration initiates and sustains.

B. *The Typical Process: Profession, Baptism, Reception*

In the Baptist tradition, the process by which a person moves from outside the formal covenant community to inside it follows a three-stage sequence: a credible profession of faith, followed by believers' baptism by immersion, followed by formal reception into membership by the congregation. The profession of faith, typically shared with the elders or the congregation in a membership interview or a public testimony, is the moment at which the candidate presents the evidence of regeneration that the doctrine of regenerate membership requires. The elders evaluate that testimony, engage the candidate in conversation about his or her understanding of the gospel, and make a pastoral judgment about the credibility of the profession.

Baptism follows as the new covenant sign administered to those who bear the new covenant reality. The Baptist conviction is that baptism is properly administered to those who have personally professed saving faith, as the public seal of the new covenant relationship that regeneration and faith have established, and as the ordinance of entry into the visible covenant community. The mode is immersion, signifying burial with Christ in His death and resurrection to new life (Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:11–12). Baptism is not the moment of regeneration; it is the moment at which the church publicly recognizes and seals the regeneration that has already occurred. The sequence is clear: regeneration produces faith; faith produces the profession of faith; the credible profession produces the administration of baptism; baptism, together with the credible profession, produces the formal reception into membership.

The reception into membership is the congregation's act of formally welcoming the new believer into the covenant community, typically accomplished through a congregational vote of affirmation and the public extension of the right hand of fellowship. This act is not merely a social welcome; it is the congregation's covenantal acceptance of the new member and the beginning of the mutual obligations that Lesson 10 described. The congregation is saying: we have examined your profession, we find it credible, we receive you into our covenant community, and we commit to watch over your soul, preach the Word to you, administer the ordinances to you, pursue you if you drift, and bear your burdens as you bear ours. The new member is saying: I present myself to you, I affirm your covenant commitments to me, and I commit to the obligations of membership. This is the moment at which the doctrine of regenerate church membership takes its concrete, institutional form.

IV. THE DISTINCTION FROM PAEDOBAPTISM

Two Readings of the Covenant and Their Ecclesiological Consequences

A. *The Paedobaptist Position and Its Logic*

The paedobaptist tradition, represented by Presbyterians, Reformed Anglicans, continental Reformed churches, and others, holds that the infants of believing parents should receive baptism as the new covenant counterpart to the circumcision that was administered to the infants of believing parents in the old covenant. The logic is the logic of Covenant Theology: there is one covenant of grace administered in different ways across the two Testaments; circumcision was the covenant sign under the old administration; baptism is the covenant sign under the new administration; since circumcision was administered to infants of believers under the old administration, baptism should be administered to infants of believers under the new. The covenant community includes the children of believers as well as the believers themselves, just as the old covenant community included the children of Israel.

The paedobaptist position is not a careless reading of Scripture; it is the product of sustained and serious theological reflection on the unity of the covenant of grace across both Testaments, and it is held by some of the most careful and orthodox theologians in the history of Protestantism. The Baptist tradition's disagreement with it is not a disagreement about the gospel, the Trinity, justification by faith, or the authority of Scripture. It is a disagreement about the hermeneutical framework within which the new covenant's membership requirements are understood. The paedobaptist reads the covenant of grace as substantially continuous across both Testaments; the Baptist reads the new covenant as genuinely and significantly new, constituting its community on a different and more restrictive basis than the old covenant's genealogical principle. Both traditions are reading

the same Scripture; they are reading it through different hermeneutical lenses, and the different lenses produce different ecclesiologies.

The Baptist's most fundamental exegetical challenge to the paedobaptist position is the one already articulated from Jeremiah 31:34: the new covenant's most distinctive characteristic, the universal personal knowledge of God among all its members, is precisely the characteristic that distinguishes it from the old covenant's genealogical mixed membership. If Jeremiah's promise means what it says, that all members of the new covenant community shall know the Lord, then the new covenant community cannot, by design, include those who do not yet know the Lord. The paedobaptist response is to read Jeremiah's promise as an eschatological ideal toward which the new covenant community is moving, not a present membership requirement. The Baptist's counter-response is that the author of Hebrews reads the promise as a present reality, already being realized in the new covenant community established by Christ's high-priestly work, not as a future goal. The exegetical debate is genuine; the Baptist conviction is that the Hebrews reading is the more faithful one.

B. The Ecclesiological Consequences of the Two Positions

The ecclesiological consequences of the paedobaptist and Baptist positions are significant and practical. The paedobaptist church, by administering baptism to infants before personal profession of faith, inevitably includes in its formal membership, and, in many traditions, at its Lord's Table, persons who have not yet given any evidence of genuine regeneration. This is not an accidental feature of the paedobaptist system; it is its intentional design. The paedobaptist church understands itself as a covenant community that includes both the genuinely regenerate and those who are related to the community through covenant ancestry but have not yet personally believed. The mixed membership is a designed feature, analogous to the mixed membership of old covenant Israel, within which the genuinely elect are present alongside those who may or may not come to personal faith.

The Baptist argues that this designed mixed membership produces three specific and serious problems. The first is the problem of the integrity of the ordinances: if baptism is the sign of the new covenant reality of regeneration and union with Christ, then administering it to those who have not yet given any evidence of that reality is to administer the sign without the reality, a sign whose connection to its referent is severed by design. The second problem is the problem of the church's witness: a congregation whose membership includes by design a significant proportion of persons who are not genuinely converted cannot credibly claim to be the new covenant community of those who all know the Lord. The third problem is the problem of discipline: a congregation that has designed mixed membership into its constitution by baptizing infants before personal profession has, in effect, made it structurally difficult to discipline those who persist in unbelief, because they were received on a non-believing basis to begin with.

The Baptist's distinction from the paedobaptist is not a claim that Baptist churches contain only genuinely regenerate persons and paedobaptist churches do not. The wheat-and-tares reality of Lesson 4 applies to all visible churches, Baptist and paedobaptist alike. The distinction is about design and intention: the Baptist church is deliberately designed to admit only those who personally profess saving faith, in the recognition that this design corresponds most faithfully to the new covenant's own definition of its membership. The paedobaptist church is deliberately designed to admit the infants of believers before personal profession, in the conviction that the covenant's family structure is continuous across both Testaments. The Baptist conviction is that the new covenant's own self-definition makes the paedobaptist design inconsistent with what the new covenant says about who belongs to it.

V. THE LIMITS AND REALISM OF REGENERATE MEMBERSHIP

The Wheat and Tares Will Grow Together Until the Harvest

A. *The Inevitable Gap Between Ideal and Reality*

The doctrine of regenerate church membership must be held with both theological conviction and pastoral realism. The conviction is that the church ought to be constituted of those who give credible evidence of genuine regeneration. The realism is that the church's discernment of who is genuinely regenerate is inevitably imperfect, and that false professors will enter even the most carefully maintained membership. Christ Himself taught this in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24–30, examined in Lesson 4): the field will always contain tares alongside the wheat, and the attempt to achieve a perfectly pure visible church by rooting out every apparent tare will damage the wheat alongside the tares. The doctrine of regenerate membership is not a prescription for a tare-free church; it is a commitment to constituting the church as carefully as possible of those who appear to be wheat, in the full knowledge that some tares will slip through the best discernment.

The historical witness of Baptist churches confirms this realism. Even the most carefully maintained regenerate membership will periodically receive persons whose profession, however credible at the time of reception, is eventually revealed as false. John's observation in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us", describes a pattern that is as common in carefully Baptist congregations as in any other. The deacon who confesses faith and is baptized and received with the congregation's full approval, and who departs twenty years later in a way that suggests the profession was never genuine, is a figure every Baptist pastor knows. The response to this reality is not despair about the doctrine of regenerate membership but pastoral wisdom about its limits: the church's responsibility is to receive carefully and to maintain faithfully, trusting the Lord of the harvest to accomplish the final separation that no human process can achieve.

The realistic acknowledgment of tares in even the most carefully maintained membership has two important pastoral corollaries. The first is humility: the church that has received a person whose subsequent conduct reveals a false profession should not respond with self-recrimination about its own discernment failure, as if more careful process would have prevented the deception. The Lord alone knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19), and the church's responsibility is faithful discernment, not divine omniscience. The second corollary is vigilance: the presence of tares, while inevitable, is not something the church should accept as a fixed and permanent feature of its membership that requires no response. The tares parable forbids premature separation, the attempt to root out every apparent tare before the harvest. But it does not forbid the church discipline process of Matthew 18, which addresses the specific situation of a member whose conduct has made his or her false profession visible and publicly significant.

B. *The Practice of Discipline as the Maintenance of Regenerate Membership*

If the reception process is the front door through which the doctrine of regenerate membership is implemented, church discipline is the ongoing maintenance system through which it is sustained over time. A congregation can receive members carefully and still find, over the course of years and decades, that its membership roll includes a growing proportion of persons whose connection to the congregation has become nominal and whose evidence

of genuine spiritual life has become difficult to discern. This drift toward nominal membership is the most common and most insidious threat to the practice of regenerate membership, more common than dramatic public falls, more insidious than high-profile doctrinal departures, because it happens quietly, gradually, and without any single moment of clear crisis that requires an obvious response.

The maintenance of regenerate membership through discipline requires the elders' active, ongoing attention to the spiritual condition of every member of the roll. The elder who does not know which members are attending, which are giving, which are growing, and which are drifting cannot maintain the regenerate membership that the doctrine requires. The congregation whose membership roll has not been examined in years, whose non-attending, non-giving, non-participating members have simply been allowed to remain on the roll indefinitely without pastoral contact or accountability, has, in practical terms, abandoned regenerate membership however faithfully it maintains the doctrine in principle. The recovery of meaningful regenerate membership in Baptist churches requires both careful reception on the front end and consistent pastoral attention on the back end, a willingness to address inactivity, to pursue the drifting, and, when the process of Matthew 18 has been faithfully followed, to remove from membership those whose continued presence on the roll has become a pastoral fiction rather than a covenantal reality.

The disciplinary removal of inactive or unresponsive members is one of the most pastorally sensitive and practically difficult aspects of maintaining regenerate membership. It requires distinguishing between members who are genuinely drifting from the covenant community in a spiritually concerning way and members who are simply going through a difficult season and need pastoral pursuit rather than formal discipline. It requires communicating the church's commitment to the member's spiritual welfare while also maintaining the integrity of the membership roll. And it requires the congregation's understanding that the removal of a name from a membership roll is not a judgment of damnation; it is a pastoral recognition that the member's current relationship to the congregation does not correspond to the covenantal commitments that membership entails. The goal is always restoration, not removal; but when restoration has been genuinely pursued and has not occurred, the integrity of the membership requires the willingness to follow through.

VI. THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF REGENERATE MEMBERSHIP

Why It Matters for the Church's Integrity and Witness

A. The Integrity of the Ordinances

The doctrine of regenerate church membership has three specific and significant positive effects on the health of the local church. The first is the integrity of the ordinances. When baptism is administered only to those who have personally professed saving faith, the ordinance retains its covenantal meaning as the new covenant sign of genuine regeneration and union with Christ. The congregation that observes a baptism in a church committed to regenerate membership is observing the public declaration that a specific, named person has been genuinely transformed by the Spirit of God, that the new creation that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 ("if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come") has taken place in this person. The ordinance is charged with the full theological weight of what it signifies because the church has taken responsibility to ensure that the person being baptized bears the reality the ordinance represents.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper retains its covenantal integrity when it is administered to a membership of those who have personally professed faith and given credible evidence of genuine regeneration. The Table is the covenant meal at which the new covenant community renews its covenant commitment, proclaiming the Lord's death, examining its own faithfulness, and anticipating the eschatological feast. When the Table is administered to a membership whose credibility has been carefully established and consistently maintained, it is a genuine covenant renewal of the community of the genuinely converted. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 about partaking in an unworthy manner and failing to discern the body is most directly addressed within the context of a community that has taken its membership seriously enough to constitute it carefully and maintain it faithfully.

The integrity of the ordinances matters not only for the congregation's internal health but for its external witness. The community that baptizes adults on personal profession of faith is making a public declaration about the nature of the Christian life: it is not inherited, it is not administered, it is not the product of natural generation. It is the result of the sovereign, transforming work of God in the individual soul. Each baptism in a regenerate-membership church is a visible sermon on the nature of conversion, a public testimony to the watching community that the gospel changes people, and a specific, named demonstration that the new covenant's promise, that its members shall all know the Lord, is being fulfilled in this specific community, one life at a time.

B. The Credibility of the Church's Witness and the Meaningfulness of Discipline

The second health effect of regenerate membership is the credibility of the church's gospel witness. A congregation whose membership is constituted, as far as human discernment allows, of genuinely converted persons is a congregation whose collective life constitutes a visible demonstration of the gospel's transforming power. The fruit of genuine regeneration, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22–23), is meant to be visible in the congregation's corporate life together, not only in individual members' private devotional experience. The congregation whose membership is significantly comprised of persons who give no visible evidence of genuine spiritual life, whose patterns of attendance, giving, service, and personal conduct are indistinguishable from those of the surrounding culture, is a congregation whose collective witness to the gospel's transforming power is severely compromised.

The third health effect is the meaningfulness of church discipline. As Lesson 4 of this series argued, the discipline process of Matthew 18 presupposes a community whose membership is defined and meaningful, a community with an inside from which someone can be removed and an outside to which that removal represents a genuine change in status. The congregation whose membership is carefully maintained on the basis of credible profession is a congregation whose discipline process has teeth: to be excluded from membership in a regenerate-membership church is to be formally removed from a community that has explicitly constituted itself of those who give credible evidence of genuine faith. The exclusion is a clear pastoral statement that the person's current conduct does not correspond to the credible profession on which their membership was based.

The connection between regenerate membership and the meaningfulness of discipline is particularly important for the third mark of the true church. The congregation that cannot practice meaningful discipline, because its membership has no defined basis of credible profession that provides a standard against which departures can be measured, has effectively lost the third mark. The recovery of meaningful discipline in contemporary Baptist churches is, in large measure, dependent on the recovery of meaningful regenerate membership: careful reception that establishes a specific, credible standard of profession, and consistent maintenance that holds members to that standard over time. Where the reception process is rigorous, the maintenance process is easier;

where the reception process is careless, the maintenance process becomes nearly impossible. The doctrine of regenerate church membership is the foundation on which the entire edifice of a healthy, disciplining, witness-bearing congregation is built.

VII. THE CALL TO SEPARATED AND COVENANTED COMMUNITY

2 Corinthians 6:14–18 and the Church's Distinct Identity

A. Separation as a Dimension of Regenerate Membership

The doctrine of regenerate church membership has a dimension that is sometimes neglected in discussions focused primarily on the reception process and the maintenance of the roll: the dimension of the community's distinct identity in the world. Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 addresses this dimension with pastoral urgency: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.'"

Paul's instruction is addressed to the church community's relationship with the surrounding world, not to the church's internal membership practices. But its implications for regenerate membership are significant. The community of those who are genuinely the temple of the living God, the body of Christ, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, is a community that is by nature distinct from the surrounding world. Its membership is constituted by those who have been transferred from darkness to light (Colossians 1:13), from death to life (Ephesians 2:1–5), from the domain of Satan to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. This ontological distinction, the real difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not, is what the doctrine of regenerate church membership is designed to honor and maintain in the visible institutional form of the local congregation. The church that admits to formal membership those who give no credible evidence of this transfer has, in effect, denied the ontological distinction that the gospel creates.

The call to come out and be separate is not a call to social withdrawal or cultural isolationism; the church's mission requires engagement with the surrounding world. It is a call to maintain the community's distinct identity as the people of God, a people whose membership is determined not by cultural, ethnic, social, or genealogical factors but by the sovereign work of the Spirit that transfers sinners from death to life. The congregation that maintains a clear, visible distinction between its membership and the surrounding community, through the careful reception of those who give credible evidence of genuine faith, through the consistent maintenance of the membership's integrity, and through the willing exercise of discipline when members' conduct publicly contradicts their profession, is a congregation that is honoring the call of 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 and maintaining the distinct identity that the gospel's ontological transformation requires.

B. The Pastoral Call: A Church of Genuine Believers

The pastoral vision that animates the doctrine of regenerate church membership is not a vision of institutional purity achieved through rigorous gatekeeping; it is a vision of a community of genuine believers, a community in which every member has personally encountered the living God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, has been genuinely transformed by the Spirit's regenerating work, and is giving observable evidence of the new life that regeneration produces. This is not an impossible dream; it is the normal New Testament expectation for the local church. The Pauline epistles are addressed to communities that the apostle assumes are constituted of genuinely converted persons, however imperfect their sanctification may be. The community of the genuinely converted is not a sectarian ideal; it is the basic expectation of the New Testament for every local congregation that takes the gospel seriously.

The pastoral call to maintain regenerate membership is simultaneously a call to take the gospel seriously, to take the new covenant seriously, to take the ordinances seriously, and to take the community's witness to the surrounding world seriously. It is a call to resist the inevitable pressures toward institutional growth at the cost of membership integrity, the pressure to lower the bar of reception in order to increase the numbers, to overlook inactivity in order to avoid pastoral confrontation, to neglect the maintenance of the roll in order to preserve the social harmony of a community that values congeniality over covenant faithfulness. Every one of these pressures is real, and every one of them points in the same direction: toward the kind of nominal, institutionally comfortable membership that the doctrine of regenerate church membership is designed precisely to prevent.

Acts 2:41 and 47 describe the apostolic community's experience: "Then those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (v. 41); "The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). The receiving of the word, the personal, faith-response to the apostolic proclamation, preceded the baptism. The baptism preceded the addition to the community. The Lord's own saving work preceded the community's numerical growth. This is the apostolic sequence, and it is the Baptist sequence: the gospel creates the faith, the faith produces the profession, the credible profession receives the baptism, and the baptized believer is added to the community of those who have been saved. The local church that practices this sequence is not merely following a Baptist tradition; she is following the apostolic pattern, honoring the new covenant's definition of its own community, and offering to the watching world a community that is genuinely what she claims to be.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them."

Hebrews 8:10–11, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Regenerate Church Membership	The Baptist conviction that the formal, covenantal membership of the local church should consist only of those who give credible evidence of genuine regeneration and saving faith. Grounded in the new covenant's defining characteristic (Jeremiah 31:34) that all its members shall know the Lord personally. Not a claim to divine omniscience about who is truly regenerate but a commitment to responsible discernment in receiving and maintaining membership.
Credible Profession	A public declaration of faith in Christ, accompanied by a personal testimony of conversion, a coherent understanding of the gospel, and an observable pattern of life consistent with genuine regeneration. The standard against which the church evaluates candidates for membership. Not infallible but responsible pastoral discernment based on the best available evidence.
Paedobaptism	The practice of administering baptism to the infants of believing parents, understood as the new covenant counterpart to circumcision in the old covenant. Associated with Covenant Theology's reading of the covenant of grace as substantially continuous across both Testaments. Produces a designed mixed membership in the visible church. The Baptist tradition's principal ecclesiological contrast with this practice is grounded in the new covenant's distinctive membership characteristics as Jeremiah 31 defines them.
Covenant Theology	The Reformed hermeneutical tradition holding that there is one covenant of grace across both Testaments, and that the new covenant is the renewed and expanded form of the same covenant that God established with Abraham. Grounds paedobaptism in the continuity of the covenant family across both Testaments. Distinguished from Progressive Covenantalism by its stronger continuity between old and new covenant membership.
Nominal Membership	The condition of a church member whose formal membership status is not matched by any observable evidence of genuine engagement with the covenant community: absent from regular gatherings, not giving, not serving, not accountable to the elders, and giving little or no evidence of active spiritual life. The most common practical threat to the integrity of regenerate church membership in Baptist churches.
Reception	The three-stage process by which a candidate is formally received into the covenant community of a regenerate-membership Baptist church: (1) a credible profession of faith examined by the elders or congregation; (2) believers' baptism by immersion as the new covenant sign administered on the basis of that credible profession; (3) formal reception into membership by congregational affirmation and the public extension of the right hand of fellowship.
Membership Discipline	The ongoing pastoral work of maintaining the integrity of a regenerate-membership church's membership roll over time, including the pursuit of inactive or drifting members, the exercise of the Matthew 18 discipline process when members' conduct publicly contradicts their profession, and the formal removal from membership of those who are unresponsive to pastoral pursuit. Distinguished from the initial reception process; the ongoing maintenance of what reception establishes.
New Covenant Community	The people of God in their eschatological, new covenant form, constituted through the blood of Christ, indwelt by the promised Spirit, and defined by the new covenant's characteristics as Jeremiah 31 describes them: internalized law, personal covenant relationship, universal personal knowledge of God, and full and final forgiveness of sins. The church as the new covenant community is the theological basis for the Baptist doctrine of regenerate church membership.

2 Corinthians 6:14–18	Paul’s call to the covenant community to maintain its distinct identity: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.” The passage draws a series of contrasts between the new covenant community (righteousness, light, Christ, temple of God) and the surrounding world (lawlessness, darkness, Belial, idols) and grounds the call to separation in the new covenant’s identity as the dwelling place of the living God. Relevant to regenerate membership as a description of the ontological distinction that the church’s membership should visibly honor.
Acts 2:41, 47	The two verses in Acts 2 that describe the apostolic pattern of church growth: “Those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls” (v. 41); “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (v. 47). The receiving of the Word preceded the baptism; the Lord’s saving work preceded the community’s growth. This apostolic sequence is the Baptist sequence: profession, then baptism, then addition to the community.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that regenerate church membership is not a Baptist cultural preference or an arbitrary ecclesiological rule, but the direct ecclesiological entailment of the new covenant's own self-definition. Jeremiah 31:34's promise, that all members of the new covenant community shall know the Lord, is the theological ground of the Baptist practice of receiving to membership only those who give credible evidence of personal, Spirit-wrought knowledge of God. To abandon this practice is not merely to depart from a Baptist tradition; it is to reconstitute the church on old covenant principles in the new covenant age, in explicit contradiction of the author of Hebrews' argument that the old covenant is obsolete.

We must believe that the doctrine of regenerate membership must be held in tension with the realism of the wheat-and-tares parable. The church's responsibility is careful reception and faithful maintenance, not the achievement of a tare-free membership. The Lord alone knows those who are His; the church's responsibility is faithful discernment of the available evidence, trusting the eschatological harvest to accomplish what no human process can. This tension should produce neither perfectionist gatekeeping on one end nor careless nominalism on the other, but the patient, prayerful, pastorally wise work of a community that takes its membership seriously without claiming a certainty it does not possess.

We must believe that the three health effects of regenerate membership, the integrity of the ordinances, the credibility of the church's witness, and the meaningfulness of discipline, are genuine and significant benefits that justify the pastoral effort that the doctrine requires. The congregation that practices regenerate membership carefully is not burdening itself with unnecessary institutional complexity; it is building the foundation for a community whose ordinances have full covenantal meaning, whose witness is credible, and whose discipline is meaningful. These are benefits that come at a cost, and the cost is worth paying.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

We should feel the weight and the wonder of belonging to a community specifically constituted of those who, by the Lord's own gracious work, personally know Him. The fulfillment of Jeremiah's promise in this congregation, however imperfect its present expression, is a genuinely remarkable thing. The people gathered in this assembly are people in whom the Spirit of God has worked the new birth, in whom the law of God is being written on the heart, in whom the knowledge of the Lord is not secondhand or inherited but personal and direct. That should produce not complacency but wonder, and not pride but deep, covenant-shaped gratitude for the grace that has placed us here.

We should feel a holy concern for the integrity of this congregation's membership, not as institutional self-interest or ecclesiological pride, but as pastoral love for the community's witness and the individuals whose nominal membership may be a form of self-deception that prevents them from recognizing their need for genuine conversion. The pastor who allows a large roll of nominally Christian members to continue unchallenged is not showing them grace; he is allowing them to rest in a false security that the doctrine of regenerate membership is designed precisely to prevent.

We should desire for the reception process of this congregation to be substantive, careful, and genuinely formative, not a perfunctory interview designed to minimize obstacles to formal membership, but a genuine

pastoral conversation that takes the candidate's profession seriously, examines it carefully, and either affirms its credibility with the full covenantal weight that affirmation carries or defers it until the evidence is clearer. This is one of the most important pastoral conversations the elders will have with any individual, because it is the conversation in which the church decides whether this person bears the new covenant reality that membership in the new covenant community requires.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- If you are a member of this congregation, reflect on the circumstances of your own reception. Was your profession examined with pastoral seriousness? Was your understanding of the gospel assessed? Was the credibility of your conversion testimony evaluated honestly? If the process was adequate, give thanks for the elders' faithfulness. If it was perfunctory, bring the question of your own genuine conversion to God in prayer and to your pastor in honest conversation. The doctrine of regenerate membership is most immediately an invitation to self-examination.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 as the theological description of what regeneration produces: "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Ask yourself honestly: is this description recognizable in my own life? Are there areas in which the "old things" have demonstrably not passed away, in which the "new things" are not yet visible? Bring those areas to God in repentance and to a trusted fellow member or elder in accountable conversation.
- Pray specifically for the elders of this congregation as they engage in the pastoral work of member reception. Pray that they would have the wisdom to examine professions carefully, the courage to defer reception when evidence is insufficient, and the pastoral love to pursue those whose professions require further conversation rather than immediate affirmation. Pray also for those who are currently in the process of being received into this congregation, that the Spirit would work genuine assurance in those who are genuinely His, and genuine conviction in those who are presenting a profession that is not yet matched by the regenerating work it claims.
- Identify one member of this congregation whose engagement with the community's life has become noticeably less, whose attendance has thinned, whose participation has receded, who seems to be drifting from the covenant community. Do not assume the worst; ask the best questions. Reach out with genuine pastoral concern: a note, a phone call, an invitation to coffee. The maintenance of regenerate membership begins with the kind of mutual care that takes another member's spiritual health seriously enough to act on what you observe.
- Familiarize yourself with this congregation's membership standards, reception process, and the criteria by which membership is maintained. If you do not know what they are, ask an elder. If they are not clearly defined, bring that gap to the elder's attention as a pastoral concern. The doctrine of regenerate membership is not self-executing; it requires the sustained, deliberate, institutionally supported work of a congregation that has thought carefully about what it means to constitute its membership of those who give credible evidence of genuine faith.

Key Texts: *Jeremiah 31:33–34; Acts 2:41, 47; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Matthew 13:24–30; Hebrews 8:10–12*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- What was the process by which you were received into membership in this congregation (or in a previous congregation)? How substantive was the examination of your profession? Was your understanding of the gospel assessed? Was the credibility of your testimony evaluated? Looking back, was the process adequate to the significance of what was being decided?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What four characteristics of the new covenant does Jeremiah describe? Focus specifically on verse 34: what is the contrast Jeremiah draws between the old and new covenant communities regarding the knowledge of God? What does the phrase “from the least of them to the greatest of them” imply about the comprehensiveness of this characteristic?
- Read Hebrews 8:6–13. How does the author use Jeremiah 31:31–34 in his argument about the Levitical priesthood? What specifically makes the new covenant “better” than the old (verse 6)? What is the conclusion the author draws in verse 13 about the old covenant? How does the author’s reading of Jeremiah 31:34 confirm or challenge the Baptist reading of its membership implications?
- Read Acts 2:38–47. What is the sequence in verse 41 (received the word → baptized → added)? What does “those who were being saved” in verse 47 imply about the basis of the additions to the community? What does the description of the community in verses 42–47 suggest about the level of genuine engagement and mutual commitment that characterized the apostolic community’s membership?
- Read Matthew 13:24–30. What does the householder’s instruction in verse 29 (“no; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them”) imply about the limits of the church’s ability to constitute a perfectly pure membership? How does this parable function as both a realistic acknowledgment of the wheat-and-tares reality and a mandate against premature or indiscriminate membership purging?
- Read 2 Corinthians 6:14–18. What contrasts does Paul draw between the new covenant community and the surrounding world? What is the theological ground of the call to separation in verses 16–18 (quoting Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 52:11; 2 Samuel 7:14)? How does this passage establish the distinct identity that regenerate membership is designed to honor and maintain?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that regenerate church membership is the “ecclesial entailment” of new covenant theology, that the new covenant’s definition of its own membership (all shall know the Lord) directly implies the Baptist practice of admitting only those who personally profess faith. The paedobaptist responds that Jeremiah 31:34 is an eschatological ideal, not a present membership requirement. How do you adjudicate between these two readings? What exegetical factors are most important in the decision?
- The lesson argues that paedobaptist churches “inevitably include unregenerate persons in their membership by design.” Is this a fair characterization of the paedobaptist position? How would a thoughtful Presbyterian or Reformed Anglican respond to this characterization? Does the paedobaptist tradition have adequate theological resources for maintaining the integrity of its membership and its discipline in the presence of the designed mixed membership the Baptist identifies?

- The lesson identifies three specific health effects of regenerate membership: the integrity of the ordinances, the credibility of the church's witness, and the meaningfulness of discipline. Are these three effects genuinely dependent on regenerate membership, or can they be maintained in a church that practices infant baptism and admits non-professing members by design? What evidence from the history and practice of paedobaptist churches would you cite in support of your answer?
- The lesson recommends the removal of nominal, unresponsive members from the membership roll as part of the maintenance of regenerate membership. Is this recommendation theologically warranted? What is the relationship between the removal of a nominal member from the roll and the discipline process of Matthew 18, which is designed primarily for addressing specific, named sins? Are there situations in which removal from the roll is appropriate that do not fit the Matthew 18 framework?
- The lesson presents Acts 2:41 and 47 as describing the "apostolic sequence": profession, then baptism, then addition to the community. Is this reading of Acts 2 the only plausible one, or can the passage support other readings? What role does the Acts 2 narrative play in the Baptist argument for regenerate membership? How would you use Acts 2 in a pastoral conversation with someone considering believers' baptism for the first time?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the maintenance of regenerate membership requires the elders' active, ongoing attention to the spiritual condition of every member of the roll. How well does this congregation currently know its members? Do the elders know which members are attending, giving, and growing, and which are drifting? What structures, practices, or pastoral habits would help the elders exercise the kind of ongoing attention that the maintenance of regenerate membership requires?
- The lesson identifies nominal membership as the most common and most insidious threat to regenerate membership in Baptist churches. Does this congregation have a significant proportion of members whose connection to the community has become nominal? What pastoral strategy would you recommend for addressing this reality: systematic outreach to inactive members, a formal membership review process, a communication of the covenant obligations of membership, or some combination? What are the pastoral risks of each approach?
- The lesson connects the integrity of baptism to the practice of regenerate membership: when baptism is administered only to those who have personally professed faith, it retains its full covenantal meaning as the new covenant sign of genuine regeneration. How does the congregation's practice of baptism currently reflect this connection? Is baptism administered with the theological seriousness and the pastoral preparation that the doctrine requires? What would it mean to strengthen the congregation's preparation and practice around the ordinance of baptism?
- The pastoral call at the end of the lesson envisions "a community of genuine believers, a community in which every member has personally encountered the living God in the gospel of Jesus Christ." Is this an achievable vision for this congregation, given the realism about wheat and tares that the lesson also advocates? What is the difference between the humble realism about the inevitable presence of tares and the complacent acceptance of a membership that does not seriously try to be regenerate? Where does this congregation currently fall on that spectrum?

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading Hebrews 8:10–11 aloud: “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.” Pause after verse 11. You are gathered as people in whom this promise has been realized. The Spirit has written the law on your hearts; you know the Lord not by human instruction but by the Spirit’s direct, transforming, covenantal work. That is not something you produced; it is something God promised and fulfilled in you through the gospel of His Son. Let that reality be the ground of every prayer that follows: you are praying as those who know the Lord, members of the community that Jeremiah’s promise always pointed toward.

Pray for the integrity of this congregation’s membership. Pray for wisdom for the elders as they receive new members: that they would examine professions with pastoral care, theological clarity, and the courage to defer reception when the evidence is insufficient. Pray that the reception process would be a genuinely formative experience for candidates, that the conversation with the elders and the congregation’s affirmation would be moments of genuine covenant-making, not bureaucratic formality. Pray that every person received into this membership would be genuinely the Lord’s, bearing the new covenant reality that their baptism and their membership represent.

Pray for this congregation’s current members with specificity. Pray for those who are growing in faith and faithfulness, that the Spirit would sustain and deepen the work He has begun in them. Pray for those who are struggling, with doubt, with sin, with spiritual dryness, with the difficulties of the Christian life in a hostile world, that the community’s mutual care and the elders’ pastoral oversight would provide the support and accountability they need. Pray for those who are drifting, whose attendance has thinned, whose engagement has receded, whose connection to the covenant community has become nominal, that the Lord would work in their hearts and that the community’s pastoral pursuit would be the means of their restoration.

Pray for those who are currently being prepared for baptism and membership in this congregation. Pray that the Spirit would confirm in them the genuine regeneration that their profession claims. Pray that their baptism would be a moment of genuine covenant-making and genuine public testimony, a visible declaration to the watching community that the God of Jeremiah’s promise is still calling men and women into His new covenant community through the gospel of His Son. Pray for those in the congregation who are not yet believers, family members, friends, neighbors who hear the gospel in this community but have not yet personally responded to it, that the Lord would draw them through the proclamation of His Word into the community of those who know Him.

Close by giving thanks for the covenant God who makes and keeps His promises. Jeremiah announced a new covenant more than six hundred years before it was established. The author of Hebrews announced that it had been established in the blood of Christ. The congregation gathered in this room is evidence that the promise is being kept, that the God who said “I will be their God, and they shall be My people” is still calling, still saving, still placing His law on human hearts, still giving the personal knowledge of Himself that the new covenant promised to all its members. To Him alone be the glory, in this church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations forever and ever.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Jeremiah 31:33–34; Acts 2:41, 47; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Matthew 13:24–30; Hebrews 8:10–12

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com