



COVENANT
AFFIRMATIONS

The necessity of the new birth. When the Covenant Church affirms that it is evangelical, it proclaims that the new birth in Jesus Christ is essential. We teach that “by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God conquered sin, death, and the devil, offering forgiveness for sin and assuring eternal life for those who follow Christ.”⁴ New birth is more than the experience of forgiveness and acceptance. It is regeneration and the gift of eternal life. This life has the qualities of love and righteousness as well as joy and peace.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3). To enter the kingdom is not only to have a right relationship with God but to be enlisted in Christ’s service. God’s purposes entail the transformation of persons, as well as the transformation of God’s world into a place of truth, justice, and peace.

As an evangelical church we believe that conversion results in eternal life. Conversion can be defined as the act by which a person turns with repentance and faith from sin to God. Conversion involves a conscious rejection of the life of sin and involves a commitment of faith. Eternal life is not given through assent to creeds alone, but through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Such a high doctrine of conversion does not mean that all believers have dramatic conversion experiences. While no one remembers the moment of

⁴From *The Journey: A Leader’s Guide for Discipleship/Confirmation* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2001).

physical birth, one's present life is evidence of its occurrence. So a person may be truly converted even though he or she has no memory of the moment of new birth. The vitality of life is the proof of birth, not its memory or recollection.

It is the will of God that all should be redeemed: "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Yet it is only through the grace of Christ that we can be saved. Our Savior declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The apostles concurred: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Covenant Church shares God's concern for the salvation of all, but accepts God's word that only those converted to Jesus Christ shall be saved.

The new birth, however, is only the beginning of life. Growing to maturity in Christ is a lifelong process called sanctification. Being formed in Christ is the goal, for both individuals and communities of believers. The Apostle Paul agonized as a woman in labor, that believers might express Christ's character and goodness in their whole being (Galatians 4:19).

On this journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ's likeness, God's people experience and express love for God and others. Healthy and effective spiritual growth takes place in the context of relationships, both within and beyond peer groups. The desired outcome of this formational process is described by the Apostle Paul: "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Being a disciple of Jesus implies costly obedience to all of his teachings. Such obedience, together with the Spirit's work in us, equips us to do the work of the kingdom, giving witness to the good news and serving others in Jesus's name.

Though there is no state of final perfection in this life, there is a process of growth from beginning to end. This growth is as much a gift of God as the gift of life itself (2 Corinthians 3:18). Together with the gifts of life and growth, the child of God receives the gifts of assurance of salvation and confidence in the faith. The Apostle Paul declares: "I am confident of this, that the one

who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

As there is no new birth without repentance and faith, so there is no healthy spiritual growth without a life of discipline. Discipline is the cultivation and nurture of the spiritual life in both its personal and corporate dimensions. Public worship, participation in the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, service to others, stewardship, fellowship, and other spiritual disciplines all enhance the Christian’s growth. A life of discipline prepares us individually and communally for passionate engagement in the work of Christ in our world. It is through transformed people that God transforms our world. It is for this reason we are called into new life. A life of discipline seeks to avoid moral and spiritual indifference on the one hand and oppressive legalism on the other.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul declares: “You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

While the pursuit of holy living does not earn God’s favor, it pleases God. It allows the Spirit to fill the Christian with joy and makes the Christian an effective agent of reconciliation.