

Redemption Hill Church

Covenant Membership

A Pillar and Foundation of the Truth

Introduction

The RHC covenant membership process developed 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 four functions:

- To establish a biblical case for church membership.
- To establish doctrinal parameters for the RHC body.
- To clarify the biblical obligations for both the elders of RHC and the covenant members of RHC.
- To serve as a tool for reflection and growth toward holiness.

Each of these functions is in accordance with the document's overall vision to provide an accessible explanation of the Scriptures in hopes that RHC would grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The RHC Covenant Membership Explanation/Agreement is comprised of a section on church membership, the Church, the nature of covenants, a statement of basic beliefs, and the obligations of the RHC elders to the RHC body and the obligations of the covenant members to the RHC body.

Why Church Membership?

Many people view churches as an unnecessary, or even manipulative, institution not particularly valuable for spiritual growth or personal well-being. This mindset has only increased in our post-modern and post-Christian culture. Because of this, joining a church is one of the most counter-cultural things a person can do.

Becoming a church member means leaving behind the comfort of individualism and voluntarily allowing yourself to be bound to others. It is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. And we do this because Jesus joyfully left behind his comfort and bound himself to us.

Many find church membership a complicated topic. They aren't sure why membership is necessary if they are otherwise committed to the church. The Bible contains at least five strands of evidence for local church membership. Each reveals something vital to the Christian faith which would be minimized or denied if there were no definable local church membership.

a. Body

Church membership is implied in the metaphor of the body of Christ.

“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.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1Cor.12:21-26).

There is a unity and organic relationship implied in the imagery of the body. There is something unnatural about a Christian attaching himself to a body of believers and yet not choosing to be a functioning member of that body.

b. Shepherding

Church membership is implied in the way the New Testament requires elders to care for the flock in their charge. Elders can extend their focus and care to anyone within the limits of their ability. However, it would seem that the Bible gives elders a special responsibility to care for a specific group or community of people.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Ac.20:28).

These verses do not say elders cannot invest in unbelievers or those who are not yet church members, but it does make clear that their first responsibility is to a particular flock. How do elders know who their flock is if not through membership?

c. Discipline

Church membership is implied by the way the church is supposed to discipline its members. The church appears to be the final court of appeal in matters of church authority as it relates to membership.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

If there is no such thing as church membership, how do we define the group of people who will take up this extraordinarily delicate and vital matter of exhorting those who are unrepentant and finally rendering a righteous judgment about their standing in Christian community? It's hard to believe that just anyone who shows up claiming to be a Christian should be a part of this process. "The church" must be a definable group to handle such weighty matters so that we know who the Scripture is referencing when it says "take it to the church."

d. Excommunication

The fact that excommunication exists implies church membership. Paul indicates this in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 where he deals with the necessity of putting someone out of the church:

"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'"

There are two significant implications here: One is that there is an "in the church" group and an "outside the church" group. Being in the church is definable. The other implication is that a person can be removed from being "in the church." Such a formal removal would not be possible if there were no such thing as membership. Membership helps to define who is an accountable part of the church body.

e. Submission

Church membership is implied in the biblical requirement of all Christians to be submitted to a group of church leaders, elders, or pastors. The New Testament commands individuals to submit to a specific group of leaders.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb.13:17).

This verse seems to imply that individuals need to have expressed willingness or agreement to submit to a group of leaders. Membership helps define who has made the commitment to be led. It is also important to know who has been chosen to lead in this process. If we neglect the importance of membership, it becomes difficult to see how we can obey this command practically.

And so for these reasons, RHC implemented church membership as an encouraged option for our attendees early on. We have seen the good fruit of this decision, and we have also experienced the hardships that come with church discipline.

But we believe we are modeling our church in the way that God envisioned, and that gives us great joy in the process.

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 forth 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 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 (2Cor.5:17-20). 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 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 (Eph.2:19), the bride of Christ (Rev.21:2, 9) and the body of Christ (1Cor.12:12-31). 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'*" (1Cor.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 (Rom.12:3-8). Contrary to the beliefs of our culture, we need each other.

Membership at RHC 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 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 (Eph.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.”

Within the Scriptures, we find a number of examples of covenants, some between God and man (Gen.6, 9, 15; Ezek. 20; Hosea 2; Jer.31; Matt.26), while others are solely between men (1Sam.18, 2Sam.5).

In some covenants, one party binds his or herself to fulfill the obligations of both sides of the agreement. In others, the parties are reciprocally bound to adhere to the obligations. While God’s covenant with the Church universal is an example of the former, the local church covenant represents the latter. If at any time one of the parties of this church covenant continues in a state of unfaithfulness to its provisions, the other is released from certain obligations.

The covenant of RHC contains many conditions that are merely general Christian obligations. For example, all Christians, whether members of RHC 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 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 member is freed from his or her membership obligations and 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 church body, her elders and her individual members, the covenant is first and foremost an acknowledgement of general Christian obligations and an agreement to enter into those duties for God’s glory and the good of the body and bride of His Son.

Statement of Basic Beliefs

The following beliefs represent the core of central orthodox beliefs from a biblical and historical perspective. While a full understanding and the ability to adequately articulate these beliefs is not required, the explicit rejection of any one of these particular beliefs disqualifies one from membership at RHC.

1. The Doctrine of God

We believe in one God eternally existing as one essence and three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully, equally and eternally God, yet there is one God. Each person has precisely the same nature and attributes and is worthy of precisely the same worship, honor and praise. The entire Christian faith is bound together with the confession of God's Trinitarian nature (Matt.28:18-20).

We believe in God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. We believe in the Son, God from God, eternally begotten but not made, who in history assumed to Himself a human nature for the sake of our salvation (John 1:14; Heb.1:3). He is fully God and fully man. Through Him, all things came into being and were created. He was before all things, and in Him, all things hold together by the word of His power (Col.1:15-20). He suffered, died, was buried, resurrected, ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father until He returns for the final judgment and consummation of the Kingdom.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son and is sent by the Father and Son to give new life (Jn.15:26-27). The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth and dwells within the regenerate (Eph.1:13-14). The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son who, in turn, came to glorify the Father. He will lead the Church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored and worshiped as God, the third person of the Trinity. The triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, is the Creator of all things, visible and indivisible. As the immortal and eternal Creator, He sovereignly rules over His creation (Ps.24:1).

2. The Doctrine of Revelation

We believe that God has made Himself known to His creation. He has revealed Himself to us in His Son, the incarnate Word (Heb.1:1-2), in Scripture, the inspired Word (2 Tim.3:16), and in creation (Ps.8; Rom.1:20). We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the perfect revelation of who God is. Jesus Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (Col.1:15), "the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb.1:3) and a perfect reflection of God the Father (Jn.5:19).

We believe the Scriptures, the sixty six books of the Old and New Testaments, are the inspired Word of God and are therefore without error in their original writings. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and free from error. The Scripture is sufficient for all that God requires for us to believe and do and is therefore to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises (Is.40:6-8). As God's people hear, believe and obey the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witness to the gospel (Rom.10:14-17).

3. The Doctrine of Creation and Providence

We believe that God created the world from nothing and governs all things at all times in all places. God created the whole world from nothing (Gen.1:1-2; Ps.24:1). God's creative work is the overflow of the love present within the Trinitarian fellowship. Creation, according to the design of God, was good (Gen.1:3-31). God doesn't let the world exist, He makes the world exist. He upholds the Universe by the word of His power, and He holds the world together in Himself (Col.1:17).

4. The Doctrine of Humanity

We believe God made humanity—male and female—in His own image (Gen.1:27-30). Set apart as His image bearers, every human being is sacred. All men and all women, bearing the image of God, are meant to represent God in His creation (1Cor.10:31). God declares the created order to be very good, distinguishing men and women as His agents to care for, manage and govern over it. They enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union in the covenant of marriage that establishes the only God-ordained pattern of sexual relations for men and women.

In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. Men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value but are distinct by divine design. As part of God's good created order, men and women are to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the home and church. As it relates to the church, men and women are both expected to lead; however, the office of elder is reserved for qualified men (1Tim.3; Titus 1).

5. The Doctrine of Sin

We believe that through the temptation of Satan, humanity transgressed the command of God and fell from their original holiness and righteousness (Gen.3).

Now the entire human race inherits a corrupt nature that is opposed to God and His law (Rom.3:9-20). Therefore, all humans are under condemnation. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to the mind, will, body and affections. Unregenerate humanity lives under the dominion of sin and Satan (Eph.2:1-3). Man is at enmity with God, hostile toward and hateful of God (Rom.8:7).

6. The Doctrine of Salvation

We believe that, due to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again (Jn.3:5-8); that salvation is only by grace through faith in the person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that all who repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ through faith are declared righteous by God and become children of God (Heb.10:19-25).

We believe the Scriptures teach that regeneration, or the new birth, is that act of God by which the Holy Spirit imparts a new nature and a new spiritual life and the person becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus (Gal.2:20). The mind is given a holy disposition and a new desire to serve God, the dominion of sin is broken, and the heart is transformed from a love of sin and self to a love of holiness and God. We believe regeneration precedes faith (Jn.3:3-18).

The salvation of fallen humanity is fundamentally the work of God. Before the foundation of the world, God elected His people, setting His affection and grace upon them (Rom.8:29-30). In love God predestined His people for adoption (Eph.1:4-6). Faith is a gift of grace that is given by the mercy and pleasure of God, so that no one may boast (Eph.2:8-9). Apart from the intervention of God, humanity cannot choose of his own accord to worship God and pursue righteousness (Rom.3; Eph.2:1-3). God's sovereignty in salvation is comprehensive: from beginning to end, all of salvation is the work of God (Ps.3:8).

7. The Doctrine of the Church

We believe God, by His Word and Spirit, creates the Church, calling sinful humanity into the fellowship of Christ's body (1Cor.12:12-31). By the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that newly redeemed humanity. The Church is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The Church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Church is an extension of the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

The ultimate mission of the Church is to bring glory to God by making disciples (Matt.28:18-20). The Church is called to make disciples through worship, prayer, teaching of the Word, observance of the ordinances, fellowship, the exercise of our gifts and talents, and the proclamation of the gospel both in our community and throughout the world.

We believe there are two ordinances of the Church. One is that of believer's baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the other is the Lord's Supper. Water baptism is only intended for those who have received the saving benefits of Christ through the new birth of the Holy Spirit. In obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the Church, oneself and the world, believers are baptized by water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Water baptism is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a believer's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts the release from the mastery of Satan, sin and death.

As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we come to the table with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

8. The Doctrine of Resurrection and Consummation of the Kingdom of God

We believe that Jesus Christ is returning to the world in the future to judge the living and the dead. The consummation of all things includes the future, physical, visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the glorification of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.

In the consummation, Satan, with his hosts and all those outside Christ, is finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment (Rev.20:7-15), but the righteous, in glorious bodies, will live and reign with Him forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then the eager expectation of creation will be fulfilled, and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God, who makes all things new (Rev.21:1-5).

Biblical Obligations of the RHC Elders to the RHC Body

As under shepherds 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 extensive overview of the requirements for elders as spelled out within the Scriptures.

- The RHC elders agree to appoint elders and deacons (including staff members who serve in these offices) according to the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1Tim.3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1Pet.5:1-4).
- The RHC elders agree to prayerfully seek God's will for our church community and steward her resources to the best of their ability based on our study of the Scriptures and following of the Spirit (Ac.20:28; 1Pet.5:1-4).
- The RHC elders agree to care for the church and seek her growth in grace, truth and love (Matt.28:16-20; Eph.4:15-16; Col.1:28; Js.5:14; 1Pet.5:1-4).
- The RHC elders agree to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Ac.20:27-28; 1Tim.4:16; 2Tim.4:1-5; Titus 2:1).
- The RHC elders agree to equip the members of the church for the work of ministry (Eph.4:11-16).
- The RHC elders agree to be on guard against false teachers and teachings (Matt.7:15; Ac.20:28-31; 1Tim.1:3-7; 1Jn.4:1).
- The RHC elders agree 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 (Matt.18:15-20; 1Cor.5; Gal.6:1; Js.5:19-20).
- The RHC elders agree to set an example and join members in fulfilling the obligations of church membership stated below (Phil.3:17; 1Tim.4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1Pet.5:3).

Biblical Obligations of the RHC Covenant Members to the RHC 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" (Rom.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.

- The RHC covenant members agree to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps.119; 2Tim.3:14-17; 2Pet.1:19-21).
- The RHC covenant members agree to pursue the Lord Jesus Christ through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of spiritual disciplines (Lk.18:1; Ac.17:11; 1Cor.9:24-27; Eph.5:1-21; 1Thess.5:12-22).
- The RHC covenant members agree to follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - By being baptized after conversion.
 - By regularly remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through Communion.
- The RHC covenant members agree to regularly participate in the life of RHC by attending weekly services, engaging in gospel-centered community and serving those within and outside of this church (Ac.2:42-47; Heb.10:23-25; Titus 3:14).
- The RHC covenant members agree to steward the resources God has given them, including time, talents and treasures. This includes regular financial giving, service and participation in community that is sacrificial, cheerful and voluntary (Matt.25:14-30; Rom.12:1-2; 2 Cor.8-9; 1Pet.4:10-11).
- The RHC covenant members agree to, by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, walk in holiness in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:13-16, 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:
 - I will practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within 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 (Rom.13:11-14; 1Cor.6:15-20, 10:8; Eph.5:3; 1Thess.4:1-8; Heb.13:4).
 - I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at RHC before pursuing divorce from my spouse (Matt.19:1-12; Mk.10:1-12; Lk.16:18; 1Cor.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).

- I will refrain from using illegal and recreational drugs such as marijuana, drunkenness, gossip and other sinful behavior as the Bible dictates (Rom.1:28-32, 13:13; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:18; Js.3:3-18).
- The RHC covenant members agree to refrain from such activities that the Scriptures would deem foolish (Rom.14:14-23).
- The RHC covenant members agree to take seriously the responsibility of Christian freedom, especially actions or situations that could present a stumbling block to another (1Cor.8:1-13).
- The RHC covenant members agree to submit to the discipline of God through His Holy Spirit:
 - By following the biblical procedures for church discipline where sin is evident in another—the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration (Matt.18:15-18).
 - By receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers (Ps.141:5; Matt.18:15-20; 1Cor.5:9-13; Heb.12:5-11).
- The RHC covenant member agrees to do the following when he or she sins:
 - I will confess my sin to God and to fellow believers (1Jn.1:19; Js.5:16).
 - I will repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Rom.8:13; Col.3:5; Js.5:16; 1Jn.1:6-10).
- The RHC covenant members agree to submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Eph.4:1-3; Heb.13:17; 1Pet.5:5).
- The RHC covenant members agree to do the following should he or she leave the church for righteous reasons:
 - I will notify an elder/pastor.
 - I will seek another church with which I can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and carry out my biblical responsibilities as a believer.

Covenant Agreement

I, _____, affirm the Statement of Basic Beliefs and Biblical Obligations of the RHC Covenant Members, and agree to, by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, fulfill these obligations as an RHC covenant member.

Signature _____ Date _____

Spouse:

I, _____, affirm the Statement of Basic Beliefs and Biblical Obligations of the RHC Covenant Members, and agree to, by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, fulfill these obligations as an RHC covenant member.

Signature _____ Date _____

Elder Signature _____