

Covenant

Covenant of Belief



Well, good morning, 360 Family. If you're here for the first time today, my name is Steve McCoy. I am a lead pastor here. You've picked a great Sunday to jump in. The reason is for the next six weeks we're going to take time to talk about us together. It's important. Probably about once a year, we do this to say, "Let's kind of lay out for ourselves the things that are of core importance." Where we're heading, you'll hear a little bit today. Some of what I shared with our small group leaders about a week ago, kind of a horizon of what's up for the next year. We won't spend too much time on that this morning, but it will unfold as we go forward. I think it's healthy for us, as a family, to do that once in a while.

It is no secret to us — it's common in our culture — that we have been conditioned for individualism. There's this tension, I believe, between individualism and a word that I'm going to make up this morning — a synthetic word. "Togetherism." Because when you have an ism, it's not just a thing. We're not talking about just being together, but the act of being together; the process of being together. Individualism is the act of being an individual and individualistic. So, I think it's important for us to see these differences because our society has given us permission in our 21st Century mindset to be, what I'll call, social migrants. Being driven from one place to the next based on likes and dislikes rather than being anchored by resolve; anchored by the things that should hold us together.

We see this in the institution of marriage. We see this in the respect or the disrespect of government, of authority, of the police force. We see this sense of individualism cropping up all over our culture, and we see it in the church world as well. When you look at the span of the last 100-125 years or so, it's easy to track when you look at larger pictures of the American culture. We begin in 1901-1925. That generation was called the G.I. Generation. The mantra, the core driving point, of the G.I. Generation was toward cooperative social discipline. Let me say that again. Cooperative social discipline. One for all; all for one. That was the mantra of that group of people. In other words, it didn't matter if they liked it, if they disliked it, they were in all the way.

My father comes from this generation. I'll never forget, growing up in a church, we had a pastor whose name was Pastor Hinkley. No one liked Pastor Hinkley, but no one left the church. This was the G.I. Generation, man. We were going to outlive Pastor Hinkley, and we did. He died young. Huh. That's weird. No. I'm just kidding.

Following the G.I. Generation was the Silent Generation. The Silent Generation began from 1926 to about 1945. The Silent Generation also believed in system versus individual enterprise. And then my generation: The Boomers. 1946-1964, if you were born in those years. When the Boomers, even the early Boomers, came to age, so to speak — when they were teenagers and in their early 20s, it landed them right in the 1960s. The 1960s was a decade of revolution. Some good revolution, some individualistic, dangerous revolution. There was a revolution we call the Civil Rights Movement. It was one of the most important and critical revolutions and movements in American history. It was a needed revolution. There were also other revolutions of sex, drugs, rock and roll. The Love Revolution, the Feminism Revolution; revolutions that were more dangerous and certainly thrived on the disrespect of authority.

I grew up in this generation. I grew up in the 1960s. Following the Boomers, we have Gen-X. We have, now, the Millennials. Those generations gave birth to this marvelous thing we call technology. In technology, even though we are globally connected — I literally speak to people around the world every week — locally and relationally, we have found ourselves in silos. I remember back in the day in 60s, in high school, we'd be at a gathering of friends and somebody would have to get up and put the needle on the LP. Then we'd go back and sit on our couch, and that's all the details I'll give you after

that moment. But nobody was getting up to change the songs. You know? We're there. We're planted on the couch.

When we first started 360, I was a substitute teacher for six years because I was bi-vocational. I would sit in these classes as a substitute teacher and they'd like me because I allowed them to use their iPods against all rules. I looked out and it was just a vivid picture that we were no longer sitting together on a couch, listening to the same song, but everybody had music in their own head. Their own music, their own style, their own beat with their earbuds. They found themselves in their own musical silo. It represents for us where we find ourselves. In other words, we are a culture that has put earbuds on, so to speak, and we find ourselves individual.

It is critical to understand that togetherism brings tension. There is a difficulty in relationships that brings hardship. But there is the essence of togetherism that is irreplaceable because God designed us to be together. I draw our attention to the very first page of the Bible in Genesis 1:26.

When God was creating Adam, He said, ***“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,”***

The mysterious togetherism of what we call the Trinity, which is, as we sang already this morning, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Profound, mysterious, and yet the core of who we understand God to be. This is the image and the architecture and the engineering in which we're made. In fact, after God completed this ingenious creation of all things working together with oxygen, water, nitrates, phosphorus, planets, gravity, sea currents and all of those things, there was that one thing that was not good by God's own confession, and that was that Adam, who had been created and designed in this togetherism image, found himself alone. So, God said, “I will create a family from you. I'll give you a wife. You'll have children.”

Those children then procreated. They multiplied. This is God's engineering. As you look at the history throughout the Old Testament, God said, “I'm going to have a long-term relationship with them. I'm going to picture what togetherism is. I'm going to picture for you how hard it is to have relationships. I'm going to picture what the essence, though, of beauty is, of being together.”

Because, you see, when we come together and we get close, I can look out at this room and 90% of you I don't know all that well. Maybe, for you, it's a larger amount, but 90% of you will never tick me off because we don't know each other well enough. It's that 10% that tick me off in the parking lot just about 10 minutes ago. No. I'm just kidding. It's when you grow close to people. There is no way that anybody in the body of Christ who is in Eastern Europe right now has ever ticked me off and will ever tick me off because I don't know them. I'm not that close. It's when you get close to people that you learn their traits, you learn their weaknesses, that you rub each other the wrong way, you have different opinions, etcetera. And even though that is hard, when you think about the institution of marriage, it is difficult. There is no one who would be sitting in this room that says, “I've been married and I don't understand how hard it is.”

It is hard, but there's a beauty in it as well. And when marriages break up, it is a painful experience for those of you who have gone through that. It's a painful experience and it's just evidence that this is the way God made us. If we weren't relational by nature, then we wouldn't care, but that's why it hurts so much when people go through that experience. It reminds me, then, in the Old Testament that God moved from a nation — the nation of Israel, in which He divided them into 12 segments or tribes — that when we get to the New Testament, that tribe is now a local church. There's a larger nation that we would call the body of Christ at large, but then there are these tribes that we call a local church. There's nobody in the body of Christ at large that will rub you the wrong way. It's only right here. It's only in your local family that we have a chance to really not only work through resolve and patience that's required in relationships, because it doesn't matter if you're here or you're down the street or three blocks away or in another city, you will, if you get close to people, experience both the beauty and the hardship of it. It's no different. We sometimes fool ourselves into this migrant mindset that it's just better down the street. It's not. It's difficult there as it is here.

That's why in the New Testament, in Galatians 6:2, we're told, ***“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”***

He said, “Love one another as I have loved you,” because He stuck with the same 12 guys for 3 and a half years and you know — you read the frustration, in between the lines and overtly, that Christ had. I would propose to you this morning that this only happens with longevity. Migrants never faced relational difficulty. It’s only when you’re in longevity, and that longevity requires something called “resolve.” But I would propose to you that when relationships get difficult — and they will — it is not resolve that brings us through. It is something that comes before resolve, and that is the topic of our conversations for the next six weeks. It’s covenant.

You see, when I stood at the altar almost 23 years ago with my beautiful bride, and I said, “For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health.” It was a covenant. And on our worst of days, in our worst of times, in our most tense moment, it’s not because either one of us have this muscle of resolve like we’re just going to make it through. It’s because we have a resolve that takes us back to that covenant. When we planted this church nearly 12 years ago, the first 3 years, and church planter will tell you, are very, very difficult. You’ve got people with a gajillion opinions, you’ve got people — talk about migrants. I mean, people are coming and going, kicking their tires. It’s so difficult and there are many days where I want to just say, “Forget it. I’ll go back to my music career. I’ll become a teacher in a university.”

It would’ve been the easiest thing, but it wasn’t resolve that kept me there. It was the covenant that I knew that God had called us to this work and it was a resolve of the covenant, not just resolve in and of itself. It was that thing that God had called us to, and to say, “You hang in there because I called you. If I call you, you stick to it.”

This is an important ingredient in togetherism. Now, let me say something important. It’s off script here. I, like you, when I’m hearing the Word of God, I’m thinking, “How does it apply to my life or what’s in it for me?”

I listen to Tony Evans. I listen to Chuck Swindoll through the week. My favorite preachers. When I’m listening on my radio or wherever it is, in the gym, I’m saying, “How does it apply for me?” I’m coming at it from that angle. It takes great muscle, and I’m going to invite you to a different dimension in these six weeks. It takes great muscle and, I say, maturity to think at a higher level — the level of togetherism. The thinking is not what am I getting out of this, but what are we getting out of this? What can we contribute? What is my part in the larger thing? Rather than, in my own silo, how is even spirituality just good for me alone? It’s not the intention of God for us to follow Him just for our own peace, for our own jazz moments in the Word of God, for our own sense of relationships. That is not what it is. God has us saved for a kingdom movement.

Now, if you don’t know what I mean by that, “kingdom movement,” — if you don’t know that language, you’re like, “Wow. That’s kind of crazy. We don’t talk about kingdoms. Are we wearing crowns and somebody’s a king, queen and all that?”

The Kingdom of God is the movement of God. It is beyond the systems that we see in the world. It is not an economic system. It is not a political system. It is not an educational system. It is what God is doing around the world, and He invites us into that movement. And listen carefully: It ain’t about us — you, me, individually. It’s about us together. So, when we look at these moments, it’s important for us to say, “How do we do this strongly and better for the Kingdom, for the movement of Christ?”

A week ago, I shared with our small group leaders where we’re heading for the next year. I just want to give you a taste of that. We don’t have the time to land too heavily on it this morning. But, as a church, we have a 10-year goal. That 10-year goal is to invigorate Christianity in the U.S. and beyond by replicating small-circle culture. We will break that down at a later date, if that just went over your head. In that 10-year dream, we reverse engineer it where we have four 3-year goals and then we have, as one writer says, a “B.H.A.G.” A Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal. It’s important for us, for any organization, to say, “Hey, what are we aiming for?” We’ll talk more about this. But these are areas where we look at each other and say, “How can we do a better job?”

So, for the next year, our goal is connectivity. I’ve given you a little diagram here. We won’t get into each of these, but how do we do a better job at connecting people to know our vision? How do we connect people to serve better, to volunteer better, and an easier path to leadership? How do we care for one another better? How do we reach the outside by

sending a message through communication and evangelism? How do we even connect through prayer within our staff? How do we connect better by bringing us all together? So, each of these have different paths.

You'll notice that if you are new to 360, we have a logo. It's three circles. Those represent the three relational circles that Jesus had. The big circle represents when He spoke to the crowd. He spoke in parables. He spoke in stories. He spoke in broad concepts. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Then He would come to a mid-circle with His twelve disciples, and they would say, "Hey, can you break that down for us?" It was a deeper, connective group. And then we look at the one-to-one conversations, which represents our small circle." The one-to-one conversations that Jesus had with those who, like Nicodemus, Peter, John, Philip, Marsha and such, and He said, "This is my one-to-one small circle." It's Paul and Timothy, David and Jonathan, Moses and Joshua. This is what we call the "small circle."

Now, here's the challenge and a confession. I like little nifty things that kind of hang together, but sometimes they don't make complete sense to everyone. So, up to this point, we've called it big circle, mid circle and small circle. So, if you're walking in from the outside and they say, "Hey, welcome to the big circle," it's like, "Okay. Sounds like a steakhouse. Big Circle Steakhouse or something."

So, we decided to say, "Hey, let's put some words to these that have some meaning." So, we've landed on Gather, Connect and Grow. So, we're gathered here this morning. We connect at a deeper level in a small group. And then, when we're at a one-to-one level in discipleship, it's the most opportunity to grow. For this reason, we're changing the name of our groups. They were @groups. You know, the @ symbol, because I, quite frankly, thought that was groovy at one time to have a little circle. I thought, "Hey, that's pretty neat." And it has caused great confusion over the years to much of my delight. I know. Weird humor. So, most people would say, "Is that an app group, like on your phone?" I'm like, "No. At. At group."

At any rate, it means nothing, so our groups are now going to be called "Connect Groups." So, there's no question as to what that might mean. Every two weeks, we are going to spend time in each of these circles. I will say I'm going to spend two weeks on each of these circles. So, we begin by two covenants that we're going to talk about in the Gather circle. Why would it be important for us to gather together and covenant together? At the end of this six weeks, by the way, on October 7th — that will be our final Sunday in this journey. At the end of that, every night that week — Sunday night, Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night — we're going to offer a membership process because we have felt that it has been disconnected and we wanted something a little more clear where people could come through, understand what our core beliefs are, what our vision is, where we're going, what's important to us, etcetera.

So, on those nights, we've invited each Connect Group — I almost said @group. That's going to take a year. Each Connect Group catalyst (leader) to be there with their group on that night. It happens to be a Connect Group week. So, if you have a group on Tuesday night, we're going to invite you into that process. The reason is that we've heard over and over that it's very difficult to find a group. And so, there are things that we're going to do about that. We're going to open up our groups. We've used the word before, and you may have experienced it yourself: Closed. Doesn't that feel inviting? "I'd love to get in a group."

"I'm sorry. That one's closed."

Let me slam the door in your face while I say the word "closed." You know? It's wonderful. So, I'm encouraging our small group leaders, our Connect Group leaders, to think in more terms of not "closed," but "pregnant." That means that our groups are going to be open to the point that they will give birth to other groups. Because we can have other groups, we can have more opportunity. We've had groups that are only focused groups up to this point, but we will have Bible study groups, we'll have groups that are going through a book, we'll have groups to have groups. In other words, they don't have to have a particular focus. They can use the sermon questions that we offer and they can be there. There may be a group based on location. Maybe you live in Venice and you've got a group of people there from the church that happen to live in that area.

The point is that we want to make them more open and more broad. Not losing our vision at all, but making them more open so that there becomes more connectivity. I know many of you have looked for a group and it's had that closed feel, so we hope that that will change things and I'm very excited about that change.

Okay. So, enough of that for today. We'll unfold it a little bit. I want to focus this morning in the rest of our time on one of the two things that I believe are important as a unit, together, that we say, "This is something worthy of making a covenant together," and why that is. What I'm speaking of today is the covenant of beliefs, that a church should have a core set of theological, doctrinal, biblical beliefs that we all agree on — and there's a reason for that. Every organization that you join has a certain set of beliefs that you say, "I want to be a part of this, and I agree by covenant to this set of beliefs, and I believe that's important.

We're going to begin today in the Acts 1 because this was the launch of the Church. Now, as a background, Christ shows up in the early part of Acts 1 and He's speaking with the disciples. It's revealed to us that He's been on earth now, after the resurrection, for 40 days. Nearly a month and a half where Christ has interacted after He's come back from the dead. He then meets up with a group of disciples, and then He ascends to heaven. He is taken to heaven, and now they're look at each other and saying, "It's on us." So, I want you to see the guiding factor of this new Church that's going to give birth; this new movement called "Church" that's going to give birth.

You remember that one of the 12 disciples, Judas, had betrayed Jesus. Judas had taken his own life and now there were only 11. So, you might say, "Okay. Let's move ahead with the 11. Why would we need to replace Judas?" But there was this drive to replace Judas. And the drive came from a shared belief that the Word of God was navigating them. Watch this. I find it fascinating.

Acts 1:20. Peter stands up and says, "***For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'May his [Judas'] place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,'***"

That's a very profound verse. He's talking about his eternal destination.

But then he says, "***May another take his place of leadership,***" — and he's quoting from the Book of Psalms.

Alright. So, I'm in New York City and I've got my little map app out. Right? You come up out of the subway, it tells you what subway to catch and where to get off and all those. And then, for me, I come up out of the Subway — so I've navigated clearly to where I start and where I end, and I come up out to the street and I'm totally lost. Because I'm like, "I'm not quite sure. I'm supposed to go to 72nd and 2nd Avenue, and I'm not quite sure. Is it up that way or is it down that way?" Then I would kind of expand my screen. "Hey, there's Macy's." I'd have to put the phone, like if Macy's is to my left, I think I go...

And then I discovered, on the last day I was in New York City, that on your map app, there's this little flashlight icon. Do you know what I'm talking about? Wherever you're pointing the phone, that's where the flashlight points. And I could've just easily done that. I'm looking at people, you know, I don't think you really care about that story. It doesn't matter that much. But when I look at the Bible, I'm like, "This is how they were acting. They were following the little flashlight icon of the Word of God."

This was not just them coming up with an idea. They were saying, "Hey, the Psalms say that his leadership should be replaced." In other words, together, they were guided by shared core beliefs that came out of the Word of God. If we're going to operate in a culture of individualism, it matters that we say, "We believe these things and they will be our guiding icon."

Now, watch how they pick the replacement. Watch this.

"Therefore," Peter says, "***it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,***" — in other words, "We need somebody with history," — "***beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.***"

“We’ve got to pick a guy that’s been with us the entire time, that has the same, shared, core beliefs because we have been called to move the Kingdom of God and impact the world.”

What if they had picked a guy that was like, “I don’t know about this resurrection thing. I mean, I didn’t see it. I mean, I heard about it, but I didn’t see it.” Just think about the division. Think about the migrant spirit. Think about, like, “Man, I thought he was with us, but he really didn’t believe it.” No. “We need a guy that has a shared experience.”

That’s why we see in Acts 2:42, “They [together] devoted themselves [together] to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Why? Because they needed to get on the same page. Okay. I’m going to swing twice at this. It matters that we think with a togetherism mindset when it comes to the body of Christ. It’s not all about you. It is about us and what we can do. And I think there are reasons why it’s important. I believe that it’s important for you to believe, as an individual, the right things. But I believe, today specifically, I want to point out that it’s important for us to believe the core things together. Here’s a few reason why. Okay? Here’s a few reasons why.

Let me throw this phrase out to you: The Kingdom of God is moved by an infantry, not infants. Let me say it again: The Kingdom of God is moved, and multiplied, by an infantry of soldiers who have a manual that they live by, and not infants in their faith. And when you begin to mature in Christ and grow in Christ, there’s something about saying, “These things are irreplaceable, they’re immovable,” and maturity happens on a together level. Watch this, okay?

Ephesians 4:11: ***“It was Christ who gave to the church some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers,”*** — why? — ***“to prepare God’s people for the work of ministry,”*** — why? — ***“so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,”*** — why? — ***“so that we become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,”***

You see, this young man gets baptized this morning, it’s just the starting line. Christ has in His mind for this young disciple, just like He does the rest of us, to grow into the full image of Christ. In every chapter. Not in just some areas, but in every chapter.

Then watch this in Ephesians 4:14. If we can do this, ***“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every kind of teaching, and the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful scheming.”***

Let me tell you that you can hear any teaching under the sun if you just go to YouTube. Just tune into the afternoon talk shows. There are philosophers all over the place. There are theologians of their own sorts all over the place. There’s a new age movement. I mean, you can pick whatever you want and you can find it. Paul, the writer of this, is saying, “I don’t want you to be tossed to and fro, back and forth.”

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow up in all things into him who is the head, that is Christ, from him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love.”

But each part must do its work. It’s important for you to be part of what Christ is doing. Okay. I’m up here. Let me come down here. What I mean is let’s make it practical. Okay? What it means to move the Kingdom of God, it always involves multiplication. Multiplication means that I now have come to the place where I can pour into others. This is the core of who God is. He is a creator/multiplier. When we come to Christ, He’s asking us to multiply. That might be, by the way, across the hall with a fourth grader. It might be on a Wednesday night with a middle schooler. It might be with a high schooler. It might be in discipleship. It might be as a group leader. But we are multiplying.

There was a guy in my group yesterday, when we were meeting together, who was a pastor for many years. I’m saying, “Hey, man. What are you doing? Where are you serving in the Church?” He said, “I’m beginning to pour into some of the young guys that sometimes will come to me and ask me, who are preaching on Wednesday night. I’m like, “Man, that is awesome.” Because he’s multiplying what God has given to him.

So, listen, here's the expectation of God in Hebrews 5:12: ***“By this time you ought to be teachers.”***

You see the expectation of God, like, “Man, I didn't give this to you to keep a little seed. I gave this thing to you, this true to you, so that it would grow and you would be able to teach others.” Whether it's a four year old, a fourth grader, a middle schooler, a high schooler, in discipleship, in a small group, somewhere, you ought to be giving out at some point and not just taking in. So, by this time, you ought to be teachers. But He's kind of spanking them here. He Says, “But now you need someone to teach you the basic truths again; the elementary truths of God's Word all over again.”

“You need milk, not solid food!”

He's kind of scolding.

“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

Okay. Here's what I mean: If we cannot agree by covenant on the core beliefs that God has given to us, how in the world can we release you to multiply? Just think about it. You're on Wednesday night and you're teaching middle school, like, “You know this whole thing about the resurrection? I don't know. I heard something different on YouTube. I'm not quite sure all about it.”

Guess what? In science, do you know what it's called? Mitosis. There's a cell. When a cell divides, “bloop,” it makes more of itself. But it looks like itself. This is the power of multiplication. That is one of the primary reasons that it's important for togetherism to say, “These are the things that we believe and we're going to hold to these truths when we move the Kingdom of God when we multiply.”

Does that make sense? It's important. Otherwise, what happens is the trajectory of it is perilous. Perilous. Now, listen, we're about to get to it, but I'm not saying, “This is the version of the Bible you've got to use.” We're not talking about, “This is the exact time when Christ is going to come,” and we're pre-trib, post-trib, pan-trib, alter-trib or whatever. Those are the peripheral things. But it's important that we have this core set of beliefs because we multiply.

Here's the second thing. Here's the second thing. I won't spend a lot of time on this. Preservation. Preservation. In a prophetic word, Paul wrote in his last letter on the last page, 2 Timothy 4:3, ***“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine [core beliefs]. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”***

I.e., “All roads lead to God. It doesn't matter. It's too narrow to say that Christ is the only way.” I hear it all the time because it feels warmer. It feels fuzzier.

“They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

But here it is right here. These two words: “But you.” But you. “You must preserve the truth together. What he's saying is it's going to fall apart, though. It's going to become unglued. Everybody's going to believe, but you must carry the covenant of core beliefs because I've given you this word of truth.”

“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

It is important for us to realize that in the Old Testament, in this community that they had, that the most sacred thing that existed for them in the community of the Old Testament was called the Ark of the Covenant. God made a covenant with them and He said, “I want you to carry this covenant with you everywhere you go.”

There were moments of history where they messed it up, they lost the covenant and all that. “But everywhere you go, I want you to carry the contract. I want you to understand. I don't want you to ever forget that it is your job to preserve the covenant.”

Christ sits at a table at the Last Supper and He says, “This blood I give to you. It is the new...” — what? — “...covenant.” Christ has given to us together — listen carefully. If we, together, do not hold to the truths of the Scripture, who in the world will? Who in the world will? It is an important weight that Christ has given to us, and a privilege.

Here’s the final thing: I believe that we have shared beliefs, a covenant of beliefs, because we move the Kingdom of God by infantry, not by infants. I believe that we have a shared covenant of beliefs because we are called to preserve the Word of God as a group. And, finally, I believe that it is important that we understand the prioritization of beliefs. In other words, which ones are non-negotiable? There’s too much fussing going on with the non-negotiable. There’s too much fussing going on about how many points of Calvinism do you believe in? There’s too much fussing about what the spiritual gifts are, and you’ve got to have this one as opposed to this one. There’s too much fussing about when Christ is coming back. Is it post-trib, mid-trib? These are things that scholars and theologians have talked about and churches argue about.

Not too long ago — actually, two weeks ago — I received a message on our mobile app. There was an opportunity for a person to respond, supposedly for technical issues, but I get theological “assertions,” let’s call them. This person believed that if you were not baptized, that you would not be spending eternity with God. And so, the message wasn’t, “I think we differ on this.” The message to me, via email, was, “You need to change your stance on baptism because it’s unbiblical.” And it hit me how it must grieve God that we can’t move the Kingdom as He wants because we fuss over the things that are not the primary things. Is baptism important? Of course. But I’m not going to split hairs theologically over certain things. We keep the main things the main things; the non-negotiables the non-negotiables. Otherwise, what happens is we’re going to be all over the map. And I will say, as the pastor of this church, we will not argue, we will not arm wrestle over those things that are peripheral and put them in the limelight because there is too much to accomplish for Christ. We can’t get entangled like a bunch of coat hangers. Does that make sense?

1 Corinthians 8:6. I love this statement that Paul says: ***“But for us [together] there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”***

So, if you were given, today, a weekly, I invite you to turn to the center of it. You can take this home if you’d like. In the book of Acts, there was a group called the Bereans. The Bereans studied on their own. They wanted to check out to make sure things are as they should be. And I invite you to be a Berean, if you’d like. There are Scripture verses that support. These are the core beliefs of 360 and most every other mainstream evangelical church. Let me just touch on them. They’re important.

We believe that the Word of God is God-breathed and infallible. It is the heart of God that He has preserved through the ages that we have in our hands. We believe that there is a Creator of heaven and earth. It is the God of the Scripture. He made all things and all things cannot exist without Him. We believe that Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah of the earth, that He was prophesied about and fulfilled every single prophecy about Him. We believe that Christ was the only one that could take our sin and nail it to the cross and absorb the sin of humanity. We believe that it was absolutely essential that He was born of a virgin because He needed to break through the contamination that Adam put in the blood of every man. We believe that Christ lived and walked the earth, that He died a physical death. He was fully God and fully man. We believe that Christ came back from the dead in a bodily resurrection. We believe, because of that, He has ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father.

We believe that because Christ is alive, He’s able to distribute the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way, in a way that convicts the world of sin, that convicts us of sin, that comforts us, guides us and leads us. We believe that the Holy Spirit ignites in our dead souls to bring us alive again in a born-again experience. We believe that the Holy Spirit is still at work. We believe in humanity, the fall of humanity, that we were in a helpless condition, that we could not help ourselves out of the condition of sin, that only God could resolve that through the cross of Jesus Christ. We believe in salvation, that there is one — and only one — mediator between God and man: The man Christ Jesus. We believe that Christ is the way, the truth and the life. We believe in eternity, that there is a place for us who call ourselves Christians, that there is a book of

life that when we give ourselves to Christ, our name is written in the book of life. And when we stand before God, we face eternity and we only enter eternity not because what we have done or not done, but only because we have embraced, accepted, depended and trusted completely in the blood of Jesus Christ.

We believe the Holy Spirit is still at work and that He gifts people in different ways and not one way that's required. We believe in the Church, the Church universal and the local church where God expresses His ministry and moves the kingdom through a local church expression. And we believe that Christ, the Savior of the world, will come back as King and He will take His Church with Him and we will reign and rule with Him for all of eternity. God be praised by His truth.

It is so critical for us to say would you covenant together in a culture of migrants? In a culture where we're tossed to and fro based on likes? "I didn't like this song. I didn't like this deal. I didn't like what she said. I didn't like what he said." To put all of that way and live in a different dimension and say, "We believe in these vital things enough to covenant together and move the kingdom as an infantry of Christ warriors."

That's important for us. So, I'm going to pray with you. In fact, I'm going to invite you to stand with me as we pray today. I'm going to ask the band to reinforce that creed for us to sing together. And as you sing today, I would ask that your mind go to a different place. Not as an individual, but to the place of togetherness. That we, together, covenant in the things that are vital and core to what Christ has called us to be. Would you pray?

Father, thank You, God, for who You are, for what You stand for, for what You give constantly to this world. Thank You, God, for truth in a culture that wants to make truth relative. How silly? And so, Father, You have given to us this great privilege and heavy responsibility to preserve the truth, God, that You have given to us.

You've given to us, God, a prioritization to recalibrate, constantly, of what's important and what's non-negotiable. And Father, You have called us to multiply, to move a kingdom, to be part of a movement of multiplying. Whether it's in a four-year-old, a fourth grader, a middle schooler or a high schooler, whether it's in discipleship, whether it's in a group, whether it's in a relationship, whether it's someone that doesn't know Christ, You've called us, God, to move a kingdom and we must have a shared, core sense of truth and beliefs.

So here we are, God, Your people, today, and we stand united in covenant of these beliefs. And now, Father, hear our hearts not individually, but together as we come before You and confess the things that we believe. In the name of Jesus, amen.