

Thornton Heath Evangelical Church

Annual Covenant Service, 5th January 2020

As the people of God in Thornton Heath, we unite together to thank the Lord for His mercy and lovingkindness to us over another year and to pledge to seek to know Him more in the days to come.

We acknowledge that all that we have and all that we are in Christ is due to grace alone for, ***by grace we have been saved, through faith. And this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*** The Lord has saved us, justified us and will bring us to glory. He watches over our ways, meets all our needs and pours His blessing into our lives day by day.

We thank Him for His Word which ***is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.*** We seek the aid of the Holy Spirit that He will reveal more of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, that He would ***open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of His law and that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.***

We acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church universal and the Head of this local Church. We ask that He will lead and direct us in all that we do, that He may be honoured in our worship and that He may be pleased to bless all our works of service for Him.

We, once more, affirm our resolute commitment to the 5 Solas, Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone), Sola Fide (Faith Alone), Sola Gratia (Grace Alone), Solus Christus (Christ Alone), and Soli Deo Gloria (For the Glory of God Alone). ***These we believe, practise and proclaim.***

We commit ourselves to Him, and to one another, that we will seek to lead lives ***in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; that we will pray privately and corporately for the fellowship and for one another; that we will use the gifts which the Lord has given to us in His service here for the blessing of all and the praise of His Name; and that we will seek to honour the Lord in all things.***

We are very aware of many past sins and failings, for which we humbly seek the Lord's forgiveness. We can only live up to our aspirations and desires if the Lord, by His gracious Holy Spirit, grants strength day by day and we therefore cry to Him ***for His grace is sufficient.***

As His people, therefore, we commit ourselves in loving service to Him and to one another in this local church where He has called us together. We humbly bow before Him now, seeking His blessing on this church and on our lives corporately and individually.

Now to Him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of His glory, with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen

Welcome to our annual Covenant Service!

It is the custom of our church to begin each new year by restating our commitment to God, the work of God's Kingdom, to this church and to one another. To some this might appear as being superfluous, surely if we regularly attend the church we don't need to make such a re-commitment.

Why then do we feel it necessary to do this every year? **The first reason** is found in Scripture. Numerous times in the Old Testament we read of the Israelites coming together in order to restate their commitment to God, to the covenant God made with them, and to each other. Sadly, it was due to the neglect of such practices that the people of Israel fell into sin and compromise. As a church we believe that the constant reminder of both God's grace to us and our commitment to God, is necessary in helping to keep us focused upon what is of primary importance. We cannot allow our church or ourselves to take our eyes off from God, remove God from the centre or fail in being committed to each other as a church. The moment we do this, we are placing ourselves in grave danger and at risk of going astray.

Secondly, by having this annual reminder it constantly challenges our hearts as to what we believe, and how we live out what we believe. The reality is that we may be in regular attendance at church, but that doesn't mean we are committed to God, His Church or each other. Just coming to church is insufficient to gain favour with God or receive salvation from God. At our covenant service, we are reminded of what it means to truly believe in God, to be saved by God through Jesus Christ, and to be a part of God's true church. Thus, every year we challenge ourselves, by asking if this is what we truly believe and if it is visibly evident in our lives.

Thirdly, as human beings we are prone to forgetfulness, falling into bad habits and doing things merely out of a sense of tradition. Why do you come to church each week? Why do you think the church is here, what is its purpose? What role do you have to play within this church? These are questions we should always be asking, yet we fail to simply because we forget to. The result is that church and all which is associated with it is quickly reduced to a tradition, to the thing that we do on a Sunday. We just go through the motions week by week, Sunday by Sunday, with little to no forethought, consideration or earnestness. By reminding ourselves each year, it helps to break us out of this cycle of forgetfulness and tradition, and then encourages us to true faith and a willingness to serve and participate in the life of the church throughout the week and not just once on a Sunday.

Fourthly, we believe this is necessary so as to remind us that we are part of a community, a body, a family of believers. Our lives are largely insular, independent, introspective and self-centred, we seldom think of how our actions or choices will impact upon others, and we prefer to be served rather than to serve. The purpose of the church covenant is to remind us that in the church there cannot be this spirit or self-centred, introspective, independence. The church is a gathering of believers, for the distinct purpose of glorifying God, serving one another and together reaching out to our community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The covenant serves as a helpful reminder to break away from the ways of the world, and to remember that we are part of God's great family in which every member needs to serve and play their part.

There are many more reasons that could be stated, but we trust that the above will give you a better understanding of why we have the covenant service every year. We pray that as you participate in this service you will think through what you are promising and committing to. Pray that God will help you to re-centre your life upon Him, enable you to remain faithful through the new year, and both show you where you can serve and move you to serve. Pray that God might even increase your desire and love for Him, so that this year will be one of growth, increased love and service of God.

We are excited for the year ahead and pray that God would do a mighty work amongst us all, for the greater glory of His name.