



Model Christian Communities

According to Psalms 25:10, "All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of His covenant." How does a community keep the demands of the covenant? This brief essay seeks to answer this question by looking at how loving and faithful Christian communities reflect Christ's covenantal character. We review: (1) the elements of the covenant, (2) historical examples of communities reflecting the covenant, (3) a covenantal confession reflecting the covenant, (4) modern examples of communities based on the covenantal confession, and (5) resources to build model covenant communities.

Elements of the Covenant

The six main elements in God's covenant are depicted in the rainbow-colored text below **1**. (According to Genesis 9, the rainbow symbolizes God's everlasting covenant.) As explained in the footnote at the bottom of this page, Scripture abounds with examples of how God reflects his character through people who...

See Our Lord's Resources through Biblical Revelation

Know Our Lord through Biblical Worship,

Honor Our Lord through Biblical Leadership,

Make Our Lord Known through Biblical Education,

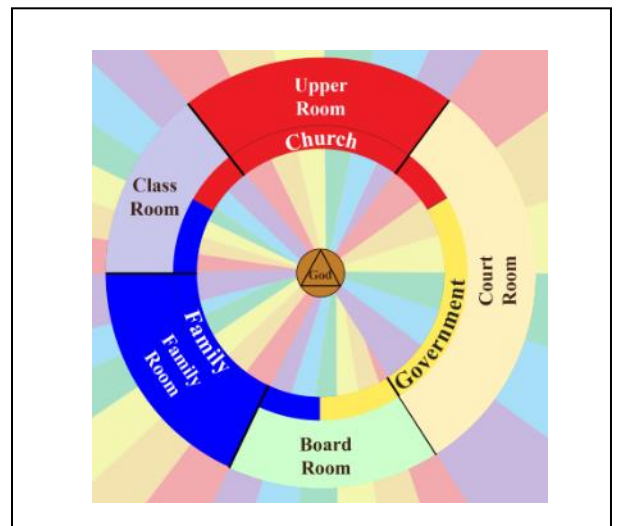
Enjoy Our Lord's Blessings through Biblical Obedience, and

Extend Our Lord's Love and Faithfulness through Biblical Church Growth

Historical Examples of Communities Reflecting the Covenant

The most successful covenantal church communities have emphasized how Christ's bride, the church, informed and influenced the entire culture through worship, prayerful leadership, education, obedience, and evangelism. A Biblical and Spirit-led emphasis on the covenant model extended our Lord's holiness and love throughout families, schools, businesses, social welfare organizations, judiciaries, and governments. Believers reflected Christ's covenantal character in the classroom, boardroom, courtroom, family room, bedroom, etc.

Some of the best examples of covenantal church communities are found in places that have applied the covenantal thinking of Augustine,



Calvin, Luther, the Puritans, and similar theologians who maintained a theonomic and hopeful worldview. Such communities have been successful both normatively and positively; that is, they have maintained a very well reasoned normative vision that has informed and influenced the actual unity and effectiveness of the community. We read about such communities in works describing medieval Augustinian monasteries, Christian gatherings influenced by [Calvin's Geneva](#), and towns inspired by early revivals and the Great Awakening (during the time of the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards).

The historical covenant communities maintained a full-orbed understanding of how the church leaders could influence every major institution. For example, John Calvin inspired his elders to oversee development of a judiciary system, sanitation program, education classes, and a hospital network in Geneva. For fascinating examples of how Christ's influence in the Geneva culture influenced the development of American culture, see [The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding](#) by David Hall.

A Confession Reflecting the Covenant

Why did some historical communities succeed while others failed? The Westminster Divines sought to answer this question by looking at which churches best reflected the character of Christ described in Scripture. The Divines assumed that successful covenant communities should encourage a consistent understanding of the Bible that prayerful men have preached throughout the centuries.

A time-tested perspective on Scripture was prayerfully articulated by the Westminster Divines from 1642-1647. The Divines summarized 33 essential doctrines in the Westminster Confession of Faith ("WCF") and the Catechisms. These Westminster Standards affirm Christ's covenant and show how a community can form rich relationships when members of a church all affirm the Westminster Standards. For more information, see [The Practice of Confessional Subscription](#) by David Hall.

The Westminster Catechisms provide practical guidelines for reflecting Christ's roles of prophet, priest, and king. Modern commentaries on the Catechisms suggest how church leaders can develop a healthy community by empowering prophets to cast a vision relevant to the church, empowering a priest to relate God's love and faithfulness to church members through pastoral care, and empowering the king to administer programs that help church members meet kindred spirits and grow. For more information, see the Westminster Larger Catechism, chapters 42- 45, as well as commentaries on the Catechisms.

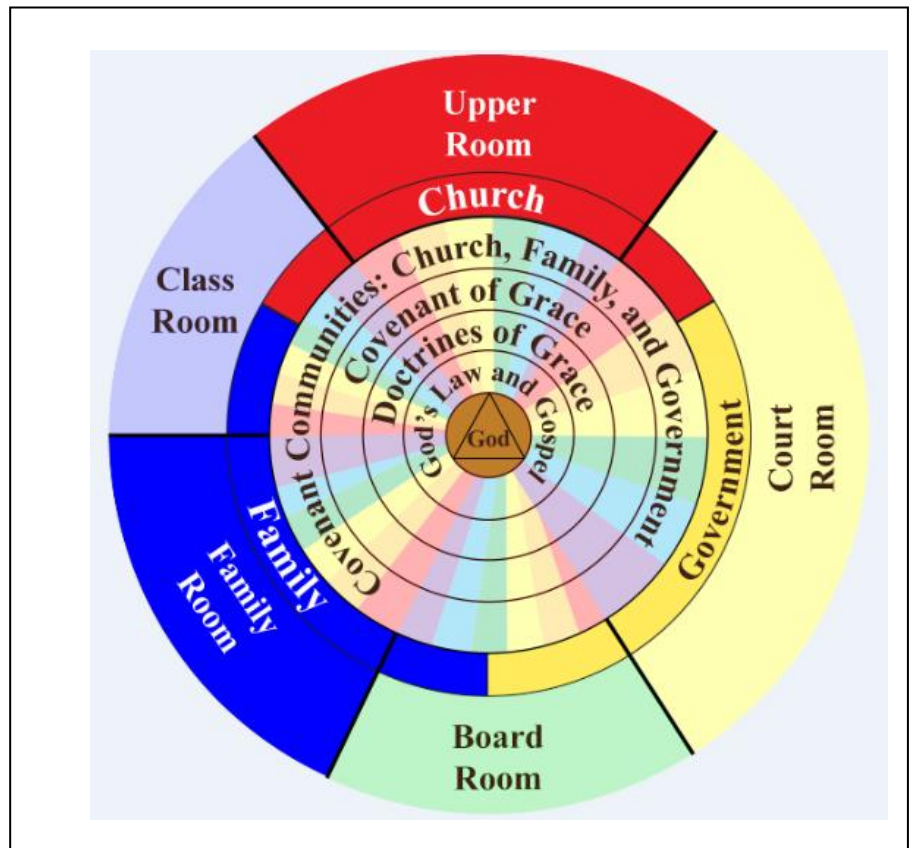
Chapters from the Confessions affirm Scripture (WCF Chapter 1), Trinity (WCF Chapter 2), the Gospel and God's Law (WCF Chapter 19), Doctrines of Grace (WCF Chapter 18), the Covenant of Grace (WCF, Chapter 7), and God's 3 main institutions: the church (WCF, Chapters 25-27), the family (WCF, Chapter 24), and the government (WCF, Chapter 23). These foundational teachings from the WCF guide development of institutions with Godly leaders that reflect the six main elements of Christ's character into all areas of culture. The following diagram illustrates how orthodoxy in the chapters cited earlier in this paragraph can lead to orthopraxy (right practices) in the rooms where Christians spend most of their time and make their biggest decisions. In this way, Godly leaders can oversee church-based family, educational, economic, and judicial institutions impacting local boardrooms, courtrooms, classrooms, and family rooms.

The Westminster Standards provide a time-tested standard for Biblical leadership. Successful churches often requires that elders either affirm the confession or state clear Biblical exceptions to the confession. These leaders learn to model what Christ revealed to His disciples in the Upper

Room. In this way, churches can uphold the standards for elders in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and similar passages from the pastoral epistles. Moreover, if all church leaders must affirm a solidly Biblical confession, or state clear Biblical exceptions to the confession, everyone can be confident that all members of the church leadership team, “set apart Christ as Lord” and that each leader will “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [him] to give the reason for the hope that [he has]. (1 Peter 3:15)

The Westminster Standards provide time-tested standards for guiding leaders in the Upper Room, Classroom, Family Room, Board Room, and Court Room. For more information about leadership in these different areas, see www.Covenant.net/Vision.

While much could be said about all of the “rooms” on the images in this essay, the “Classroom” has a vital role in equipping people in each room. Following the WCF standards, both the family and church oversee the education. Some of the most respected Christian schools actively



involve parents and pastors in discipleship relationships with students. For examples of the successful Christian schools, see Westminster Academy (www.wacad.edu in Ft. Lauderdale) and [Grace Classical Academy in Laguna Niguel CA](#). The schools have built highly-regarded K-12 education programs upon the foundation established by the Westminster Divines. Students learn how questions in the shorter and larger Catechisms provide answers that address a broad array of spiritual, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual issues. (Grace provides education for older students in conjunction with home school programs.)

A future version of this essay will suggest how churches that uphold the Westminster Confession of Faith can oversee credential programs and degree programs in all of the above “rooms.” In this way, the churches can address all of the major familial, educational, economic, and judicial problems in a community from a Christ-centered and Biblical perspective consistent with wisdom from the Westminster Divines.

Modern Communities Based on the Covenantal Confession

There are good modern examples of covenantal church communities. Like the historic models, the effective modern covenantal communities are known for their worship services, prayerful leadership, extensive education programs, obedient members, and successful evangelism. Like the Westminster Standards recommend, the successful communities equip leaders to perform the roles of prophet, priest, and king.

Like the historical models, modern covenant communities seek to follow the leading of the Spirit. This sensitivity to God helps successful churches build on historical models but also evolve in response to changing demographics. For example, church leaders in an urban area who pray about needs in their community will often notice that more than half of the local adults are unmarried. This reflects a dramatic change from 100 years ago, when less than 5% of adults were single.

Successful urban churches have therefore revised the job descriptions of the prophet, priest, and king in response to the spiritual needs and suggestions of the unmarried majority. Consequently, these churches have shifted away from traditional programs, sermons, and pastoral care methods that focus almost entirely on married people and their children. Instead, the successful modern churches actively integrate singles into the type of covenant community that most singles crave but seldom find.

Some well-known contemporary covenantal communities include Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia (under James Boice until recently), Park Cities Presbyterian Church in Dallas (under Skip Ryan & Paul Settle), Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale (under D. James Kennedy), Community Evangelical Fellowship in Moscow, Idaho (under Doug Wilson), and Christ Community Church in Nashville, TN (influenced by George Grant). Web links for model churches are at the bottom of this page.

Resources to Build Model Covenant Communities

The Covenant Network site, posted at www.covenant.net, casts a vision for "covenant communities reflecting Christ's covenantal character." The site surveys visitors to identify which communities best model the great communities described in chapter 2 of Acts, in writings about Calvin's Geneva, in books about the Puritan's New England, and in modern articles about Tenth Presbyterian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, and other churches that build solid 24/7 community on a foundation of covenant theology.

The www.covenant.net web site also includes covenant theology quizzes that provide an engaging way to test how knowledge of Christ's covenantal character influences leadership decisions in the above areas. See www.Covenant.net/Quiz1, www.Covenant.net/Quiz2, and www.Covenant.net/Quiz3.

The [covenant.net](http://www.covenant.net) web site tests the hypothesis that the best communities are comprised of leaders who best teach and practice covenant theology. The web site will also help collect data from church members to show which churches fail to develop community and which church leaders fail to teach about our Lord's covenantal character.

By celebrating the communities that most honor and glorify the Lord of Augustine, Calvin, Luther (an Augustinian monk), the Puritans, and other great leaders, the web site can serve a valuable purpose. To keep the site's message positive and encouraging, the site will link to many articles, recorded lectures, and other resources to support church leaders who want to improve their scores on the church surveys or on the theology quizzes. The site will also solicit feedback from viewers who want to support or challenge any of the assumptions or statements in material posted on the site. Ideally, as web viewers provide feedback, the [covenant.net](http://www.covenant.net) web pages will eventually provide links to all resources that a church leader needs to build on the very successful church models around the world.

Below is a partial list of churches that have built strong covenant communities.

With time, we hope that www.covenant.net can identify and help equip dozens of similar communities that powerfully reflect Christ's covenantal character throughout the community.

Church Web	Church School	Leader	Church
www.accsedu.org	www.nsa.edu , www.greyfriars.org	Doug Wilson	Community Evangelical Fellowship
www.crpc.org	www.wacad.edu/about.htm	D. James Kennedy	Coral Ridge, Ft. Lauderdale
www.faihtatoma.org	Covenant High School	Dr. Rob Rayburn	Faith Presbyterian
www.christcommunity.org	Franklin Classical School	George Grant	Christ Community Church in Nashville
www.tenth.org	City Center Academy	James Boice's successors	Tenth Presbyterian Church

FOOTNOTE:

[1] The elements above reflect God's Resources (R), Transcendence (T), Hierarchy (H), Ethics (E), Outcomes of Obedience (O), and Succession (S). For example, the rainbow-colored text could be rewritten as follows:

See Our Lord's Resources through Biblical Revelation

Know Our Lord's TRANSCENDENCE through Biblical Worship,

Honor Our Lord's HIERARCHY through Biblical Leadership,

Make Our Lord ETHICS Known through Biblical Education,

Enjoy Our Lord's Blessed OUTCOMES through Biblical OBEDIENCE, and

Extend Our Lord's Love and Faithfulness through Biblical Church Growth and SUCCESSION

This RTHEOS structure is evident throughout the Bible, especially in the organization of The Lord's prayer; the Great Commission; the writings of Moses; and the books of Psalms, Matthew, Romans, and Revelation. The RTHEOS structure is also evident in all covenantal commitments between God and man.

A practical application of the RTHEOS structure is summarized in the following passage from Colossians 1:3-12. In verses 3-8 we see the revelation from the Trinity as Paul reveals knowledge from Christ, the Spirit, and God. Building on this revelation, Paul affirms transcendent wisdom and understanding. He then discusses our Lord's plan for representational hierarchy, ethics, outcomes, and succession. Paul writes, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. [Transcendence] And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord [Hierarchy/Representation] and may please him in every way [Ethics]: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God [Outcomes], being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father [Outcomes], who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. [Succession]"

The RTHEOS structure can form a Biblical model for reflecting Christ's character in families, education, social welfare programs, and the government. A future version of this web page will provide numerous references to explain how successful institutions apply the THEOS structure.

For additional materials about the prophet, priest, and king, see:

SUBTOPIC	AUTHOR	TITLE	URL
as King	Boice, James	King Has Come	http://tinyurl.com/KingHasComeBoice
as King	Sproul, R.C.	King Without a Shadow*	http://tinyurl.com/KingWithoutShadow
as Prophet/Priest/King	Murray, Andrew	The Believer's Prophet, Priest & King	http://tinyurl.com/BelieversProphetPriestKing
as Savior	Warfield, Benjamin	Savior Of The World, The	http://tinyurl.com/SaviorOfWorldWarfield

Copyright 1993-2012
tim@covenant.net