

If you have your Bibles, let's go to 1 Peter 5. We are in the middle of a series on the church, so let me tell you where we've been and I'll tell you right at the beginning what I want to show you today. We started two weeks ago, and we said that the church was God's plan or that God's plan was to redeem all that fell in the fall. He comes to Abraham and says, "Through your line, I'm going to do this. I'm going to restore the rhythm, the shalom that I created before sin entered into the world. And I'm going to do that through your bloodline." And then from Abraham we went into the Law and then into the prophets and then into the gospels. And then we went into Acts and we went into the letters of Paul and we went into church history. And we saw that God told Abraham in the first document we have of that first conversation between Abraham and God, "Through you, I'm going to form a people. And then out of that people, I'm going to bless every people on the face of the earth so that My message, the gospel message is going to go every culture, identify the truth and complete it." And so I just kind of howed you in history how that has happened exactly. And I even tried to track for you and show you some things that the UN just put out in regards to the growth of Christianity in Asia, South America and Africa. And so we came back last week and said, "If that's what's going on all over the world and if that's God's plan, what does it look like at a macro level?" And so we covered what the church looks like at a macro level last week. We said that the church is all believers everywhere over all time. And what marks us distinctively as a church are two things. The first is where the Scriptures are rightly divided, where the gospel message is taught. The gospel message is that we're broken people in need of salvation, and God comes in the flesh, pays the bill for those who would believe, He is resurrected on the third day and ascends into heaven until the consummation of all things, which is the church spreading to every tribe, tongue and nation on the planet earth. So we covered that last week. A church is where there is the rightly teaching of the Word. I think the example I gave you of how silly it can get was an example of how a sermon called "Debt is Dumb" might even line up with Scriptural ideals, but if the gospel is not in there, you don't have the church. And then church is also where you've got the sacraments rightly ministered: baptism and communion. And so that's what a church is. If you lose either one of those, you don't have the church anymore. You've got a gathering of people, you've got good people, you've got humanitarian causes, you've got good things; you just don't have the church. And so that's what the church looks like at a macro level.

What I want to do today is look at the church on a micro level. And here's what I'm going to try to show you. It is the biblical understanding of the New Testament that you belong to, are involved in and are committed to a local congregation. So intrinsic is that within the New Testament message that to not be is an act of disobedience. That's what I plan to show you. Now there is not a verse that says, "You join a local church." There isn't that verse. But it's kind of like an involuntary thing. It's like your heart beating or breathing. It's so understood by the writers of the New Testament that they don't feel like they have to say it. Like no one tells their heart to beat. There isn't an ADD kid that would make it past the age of three. "Beat heart...beat heart...beat heart...Oh look, a squirrel!!!!....." No, you don't tell your heart to beat, you don't tell your lungs to breathe; they just do it. It's how it is. So I want to show you why I believe that this idea is so present in the minds and hearts and spirits of the New Testament writers that they can't fathom the ecclesiological buffet that is the modern day church. So let me show you where I'm getting this so you know I'm not just making it up.

Let me do this first. I'll just say it as directly as I can; I don't know how else to do it. This is no membership drive. I couldn't care less if you joined here. It is my understanding that there is one true church, only one. It works itself out in a thousand different ways with styles of music and styles of preaching. It works itself out differently, but there's only one church. So what I'm showing you in the Scriptures today, I'm showing you in the hopes that you will join somewhere.

But whether or not it's here, I'm not so concerned. You can ask the members here, twice a year we do a sermon lovingly called "The State of the Union Address," and in it I just ask you to stop coming here and then we see who sticks. I promise you I'm not trying to build an empire here; I'm asking God to create a deep body of faithful believers and those trying to be.

There So let me point out why I think this is an idea pointed out constantly in Scripture. There are dozens and dozens of texts that describe the relationship between those who are in a local context and their leadership. Let me read you some of these. Hebrews 13:17 says this, "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." So it's saying that you have an authority over you. You have elders and rulers over you that set direction, set pace. That's what you have. You have a God-given authority. And then it just says, "Hey, don't try to wear them down, man." What advantage is it to you if your spiritual leaders are like, "God, I really hate them. Give me the grace to love them well...or move them to Valley Creek. Amen." It's of no advantage to you to try to beat down spiritual leadership. 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." And so you've got this idea of giving honor to the elders who govern well as they teach and lead you well. Here's my question: If there is no local context, to whom are you to submit? Like let me throw a couple of ideas out there. What about the complete clown hats at Westboro Baptist Church who picket the soldiers' funerals, those bunch of pagan idiots? They've got elders. Do you have to listen to them? I just showed you in Scripture where the Bible says you have to submit to an eldership. Is it them? What about the Mormon elder that knocks on your door? He's like 12 years old...looking for a snack, a place to take a nap. Do you have to listen to him? Or let's do this. Kevin Evans is the pastor at Valley Creek. He's been very friendly to me since we got here six years ago. He immediately invited my wife and me out for lunch. He's been a good friend to us. They have elders there. Let's say they get together in an elder's meeting on Wednesday night and go, "You know what, we don't think it's a good idea for the Village to move into Albertson's. We just don't think it's wise. We don't think it would be healthy for the church and the town. Let's go tell them." And then all the elders show up at our office on Thursday and are like, "Matt, first let me read to you Hebrews 13, and we just don't think it's a good idea for you guys to move into Albertson's." Now do we have to obey that? So if there is no local context, then how does that work?

There's also all these commands given to elders. Look in 1 Peter 5. "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you,..." So now we've specialized it, haven't we? It's not, "Shepherd the flock of God everywhere." That's not what the elders were commanded to do. But it's, "shepherd the flock of God among you." So there is a local context to the church universal in which elders are appointed and submitted to. Let's keep going. "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." You can see in his understanding of church that there are local elders and local members who work together in humility in regards to one another that form this body. So once again, if there's no local context, who are we supposed to elder? I'll give you a couple of examples. This coming week, I'm down in Dallas for an Innovation3 leadership network conference and I'll speak twice down there, and then I'll come back and speak on our weekend services. And then the Monday after that, I'll hop on a plane and fly to Minnesota for the Desiring God conference, which I'm excited about. It was -22°F there yesterday. And so I'll fly home, celebrate Audrey's birthday and then come back and preach here. And then I'm on a plane to Jacksonville where I'm doing the Southern Baptist Convention's pastor's conference. If something happens to me out there, just someone look into it. So you can see that I travel quite a bit, but I'm not ultimately responsible for those people. I will not stand in front of God and give an account for them, not the

people who are the Innovation series, not the people who are at the Desiring God conference and not the people that are at First Baptist of Jacksonville. I will not stand in front of God and give an account for them, how I lead them. I'm not. But I will here. God has commanded, asked, set me here. And we take this text in 1 Peter unbelievably seriously. I can give you examples of how we try to do this. Every time it rains, there's a lake that forms in the parking lot along the fence line. You could fish in it. It's like 20 feet deep. Do you know who parks his car there every time it rains? Bleecker. He gets out and he gets his shoes and socks all wet so that you don't. Do you know where our pastors park? As far away from this building as they possibly can so that you don't have to. Some of us have people drop us off here because it creates one more spot in the parking lot. That's us considering you better than us. We believe this is God's command on us as elders and leaders. So if there is no local church context, who are the elders supposed to lead and to whom are the men and women supposed to submit? Now let me answer, because there is an answer that I think people like to give. "Well, I submit to the elders of whatever church I'm going to at the time." The problem with that is you're using a definition of submission that doesn't exist. You're saying, "I'll go to a place until I don't like this, don't like this and don't like this, and then I'm gone." That's not submission; that's parasitic.

I'll give you couple more examples. Go over to 1 Corinthians 5, starting in verse 1. You've got to see this. It's very daytime television. It's Jerry Springer caliber. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." I told you it's Springer. So a son is sleeping with his mother. That's what he says, there is a type sexual immorality that even the pagans don't indulge in. It could be a step-mom, it doesn't really say. It does call her his father's wife. I don't know that that makes it any better. Look at verse 2, "And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." Let me try to explain the scenario. This is a guy who is sleeping with his mom, and the church is boasting about it. They're saying, "How amazing is God! Look, God loves this guy. If God loves this guy, who couldn't He love?" They're boasting in this man's sin. And let's be real clear about his sin. He's not a guy that's struggling with this. He's not a guy that's like, "Oh, I hate this about myself. I need help." No, he's just like, "I'm doing what I'm doing." And so Paul says, "Kick him out. He has no place in the body." Why? Honestly, church discipline is the most loving act you can do. More churches don't do it because I think most pastors have gotten caught up in spiritual capitalism. It's like the largest church you can have is the best, and it's "It works, because look at all the people we've got. Obviously we're blessed." Come on man, it's not hard to draw a crowd. Look at how many people go to Rangers games. That's not even good product, but people go to that. It's like, "Let's go to watch ineptitude for four hours." It is not hard to draw a crowd. But you've got a lot of pastors who, more than they fear the responsibility laid on them before God to lead the flock well, they want to go, "Look at how many people we have." And so the first thing to go is church discipline. Church discipline is by far one of the most loving things you could possibly do. It is not kindness, mercy and grace to let my daughter play in the street. It is kindness, grace and mercy to smack her little bottom, grab her face and look into her eyes and reinforce why it is so dangerous for her to be in the street. That's love...despite the fact that there's nothing in me that wants to see my little girl cry.

Let's keep reading. Verse 9, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world." I love it. He's saying, "I wrote to you to not associate with greedy, swindling, lying, sexual immoral people, but I'm not talking about people outside of the church because then you wouldn't be able to talk to anyone. I'm talking about those inside the church." Look at what he says, "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 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." So for a guy to say, "I'm a believer in Christ, I'm a member of the Village, but I'm going to do this, this and this and I don't care what the Bible says or what God commands." No, you're not. "Well, you're not my daddy." You're right. I'm not your daddy, but I'm not your pastor anymore either. You're gone." That's done in the hopes that repentance might be his. So that when or if he comes back, he comes back to open arms and warm hearts rejoicing. Let me clarify now. This is not for those who have sin in their lives who really struggle with their sin. That's not what this is unpacking. If you're in here and you're like, "Oh, I'm out because I'm sexually immoral," or "I'm out because I'm greedy. In fact, I just stole a dollar from this lady's purse beside me," if that's you, this isn't about you. The text is talking about people who know the truth, but they're saying that they're beyond the truth. "I'm the ultimate authority on right and wrong. I'm the ultimate authority on how life works. I don't care what the Bible says, I don't care what the elders say, I don't care what the church says; I'm going to do what I want." You are going to do what you want...just not here. So it's not about people who are struggling and have sin that they hate in their lives, who want God to heal them, who want God to move in them. That's not what this is addressing. Now, I'm walking through this because in 2 Corinthians, when Paul addresses this again, this man was removed and he was removed by a majority vote. If there is no local context, how can there be a majority? If there's not an "out," how can there be an "in?"

Let me show you a couple other evidences of membership. In Acts 2, you see a numerical record. In 1 Timothy 5 there's a record of widows. In fact, this is a really interesting text. I wish we had time for it. Paul tells Timothy, "Where you have widows who are gentle, meek and love the younger women well, they do life well, enroll them. But for those widows who just go from house to house and are busybodies who gossip and stir up trouble, do not allow them in. In Acts 6, there were elections. In Hebrews 13, there's accountability. And in Romans 16:1-16, there is an awareness of who the church members are. These are other evidences.

This is what I want to talk to you about though. I'm hoping that I've shown you that this is just an idea that's in Scripture that's just there. What I want to do now is just talk about why you should join a local church. The first one should be real obvious based off of the last twenty minutes – obedience. Obedience to the commands of God concerning your life as a believer. I have found that the bulk of people who have refused to join a church either don't know they should, are lazy or in the end filled with pride. In fact, one of the questions in American culture is: Is there an authority? Most people answer, "No, I'm my own authority." That works well right up until the time you go to prison.

Obedience is the first, but let me give you one that I think is monumentally important. 1 Peter 5:8 says this, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We have a spiritual enemy. That's not church persecution. In fact, historically the more the church has been persecuted, the better it does...which might explain why we're so weak here. This is not talking about persecution, it's not about us being jailed for our faith. There is a spiritual enemy after our individual hearts. Since this is true, wouldn't it be better to have eyes in the back of your head than just the eyes in the front of your face? Because look at how he attacks. Hebrews 3:13, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Okay, let's talk honestly. Let's say I walk off the stage after this service and I see that my wife has called. I call her back real quick and she's like, "Hey, can you swing by the store real quick and pick up some milk?" And the loving husband that I am, I say, "Sure, baby." So I go to the store, get some milk and as I walk out to the parking lot a guy comes up and says, "Hey man, would you be interested in a little black tar heroin?" There's just not a big wrestle that's going to occur in my heart at that time. I'm not going to be like, "Can you give me a pen and some paper to write on? Okay, pro/con. Con: I'm probably going to lose my job. The family is probably going to take a hit. Pro: The next hour and a half would be interesting." I'm not going to need to do that. It would be an easy decision. Let's say on the way home with that milk, my boy Rich has been struggling lately so I swing by his house. I go in and sit down with Rich and then he goes, "I've just had it with my neighbor. He knows that strip of lawn is his. I don't know why he won't mow it. I'm not going to

mow it, I can tell you that." So I look out side and it's eight feet tall with Viet Cong in there setting traps. I'm like, "Rich, just mow the lawn." And he goes, "Or you could kill my neighbor for me. Here's a gun." This is just not a moral crisis for me. This is not a "Should I kill Rich's neighbor or not? On the one hand, I love Rich very much. And maybe the new guy would mow the lawn. Give me the pistol." This is not a crisis of belief for me. I think it's safe to say that 99% of us aren't going out like that. The majority of us are not going to stumble into heroin use today, and the bulk of us are not going to stumble into murder today. That's not how it works. If you can spot it coming, more often than not you're not going to fall for it. Which is why the author of Hebrews is so clear that we need one another because that active agent in sin is very deceitful, slow, subversive. The lion nibbles, nibbles, nibbles and he doesn't pounce until he knows he's got you. If you were honest, I don't ever pretend that you can be, but if you were, most of the time those big hits in your life came after a series of decisions that you made, and you never imagined that you could get here. It started back here with this little decision, this little decision, this little decision, and all those over a period of time lead to this. This is how sin works. It's not the "Will you murder my neighbor?" or "Do you want some heroin?" That's not how it works. It's this to this to this to this to this that leads to this place that we never imagined that we could go. It's with a thousand justifications from here to here. It's why we need one another, so we can go, "Whoa, I see a little bit of a disjoint here...Hey, what is this going on over here?...Hey, this doesn't add up...Hey, this move in business, it's unethical." It's for safety. There's several other verses; I'll just read a couple more. Galatians 6:1, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." 2 Thessalonians 3:15, "Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother." We need one another for safety's sake.

One more big reason why you should join a local church. 1 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 12, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 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." You have been given by God gifts, disposition, personality and a past that was not given to you so that you alone might be the sole beneficiary of all that has been given to you, but rather all of those pieces come together in the body of Christ to encourage, build up and make whole. And where you refuse, you guarantee your faith being a retarded version of what it could be. Why?

In the book of Amos, the prophet called the women there the "fat cows of Bashan." Here's why. Here's what he said, "All you do is chew cud, swallow it, then you vomit it back up in your mouth and you chew it again. Then you swallow it, throw it back up and chew it again." He basically says, "You do nothing. Here you've been given these things by God, and yet you do nothing. And in so doing, you are spiritually fat cows." You have to wonder at some levels if most Evangelicals in Dallas aren't the spiritual equivalent of fat cows who go everywhere but belong nowhere. I think one of the things that has really retarded our faith is that we don't have that type of community and we aren't committed like that and we aren't wired in like that. We like the preaching here, we like the music there. That's how we pick it. Spurgeon said that Christians are designed by God like bricks in a house. They need one another to be worth anything. He says to say that you love

Jesus but refuse to plug into, to belong to a local congregation is like a brick being kicked down the street, that every time it gets kicked it screams, "I'm a house...I'm a house." And I think that's what we've got. I think you've got a mass of believers who aren't plugged in anywhere. So the things required for safety and growth are not present in their lives, no one can speak into them, there's no authority that they'll submit to, no one can rebuke them because they won't let themselves be known. They simply come, listen to a sermon and get out. And this is not how the church is designed to be. It's not how she was designed to work. And then we're just kind of dumbfounded when we're not growing. And so usually we say something really dumb like, "Oh, I'm just not being fed there anymore, so we're going to move on to the next place." You won't find too many places in the Scripture that say it's my job to feed you. What you will find is Paul constantly rebuking people who by now should be able to feed themselves.

So maybe we can say it like this. For Christmas, a friend of ours got us a gold coin to Three Forks. The first time I ever went was three years ago. Just a little background on me – the son of a truck driver. So Golden Corral was legit. Like that was epic celebration. It was legit. So I get in, and Lauren and I sit down. The first thing that threw me off was when the dude put the napkin in my lap. That's a level of service I don't need. I think that the bulk of us – and I get this from listening to us – think that the church is like this nice restaurant. It's like, "We come sit down, and you take care of me. You put that napkin in my lap, you bring me what I want when I want it." The problem is the church wasn't built to serve you but for you to serve her. So the less you see the church in the mindset of capitalistic entrepreneurs, "I want this...I want this...I want this...I want this..." and instead start viewing it as "This is a place where I trust the leadership, I trust the direction. My family and I are here, and we're going to serve in any way possible to make this place stronger, better and fuller with the presence of Christ so that the community might see and God might be glorified," that's when the church becomes the church. That's when it starts firing off like it's supposed to fire off. Until then, it's just really goofy. You end up being people who are listening to sermons for decades and not growing at all. That's not how it was designed to be.

So I'm one of the elders here. Let me tell you where we land. We are fiercely committed to strong membership here at the Village, which is why we just rolled out a new covenant clearly defining what that looks like biblically and what that means biblically. It wasn't a means of control on our end. It was just, "Here's what the Bible says." We make membership a little bit difficult. Like you have to sit through a class. You actually have to try to get into the class first. I think the last class sold out in like 20 minutes. Did I say "sold out?" We don't sell tickets...although that is a good idea. 250 spots in the membership class filled up in 20 minutes. We never even announced it; we just posted it online. We are going to hold it in high regard. Here's what else. I have no intention of church hopping myself, so we believe God called us here for our lives, not for a quick stint. Plus I never plan on doing the first two years again. So we're here for the next forty years, and our deep and abiding prayer is that God would reach out to those outside of our faith and rescue them, save them, call them to Himself, and that we might be a community of believers fiercely committed to Christ and to the Christ in each of us, constantly seeing one another as better than ourselves, so that the community around us might say, "Look at how they love one another. Look at how they spend their money. Look at how they use their power. Look at how they fight for their marriage. Look at how they raise their kids," and our stance is never, "This is how we do it, pagan," but instead, "Come on in." And we pray that God might just do something beyond any of us individually.

I'll end with this. I completely understand and get why some of you don't want to be part of a church. Some of you have been burned very badly. Some of you were at a place where all of a sudden the pastor was wearing a cape and diamond cuff links and became the king. Some of you were at places where there was war waged in back rooms and political strife. Some of you have come from those backgrounds, I get it. We've actually come from some of those places. It's why we've tried to wire the Village like we have. Where there's a plurality of leadership and there is no king. Do you know how often I get in trouble here? Do you remember the little Mormon comment I just made? I guarantee I have an elder waiting for me somewhere. They might be at my house, they might be in the back room right now, they might be in my car in the back. When I get in I just see a lighter pop up behind me. It's Brain Miller. "That was not funny." There's

no king here, I can tell you that. There's just a plurality of leadership passionately following the Lord with a deep desire that He might be glorified in a membership that's progressively getting holier one tiny little step at a time. It's why we do church discipline here. It's why one of my first acts as lead pastor here was to begin to form a team that would one day be the elders. I don't want credit or blame. So that's what we're going to do. My hope for you. Is that you might learn to be gracious to your past and not have it destroy your present and future. And I hope that you might give it another run. It doesn't have to be here, but you're going to have to give it another run.

And then you'll see in the next two weeks, you don't ever have to submit to ungodly leadership and you don't ever have to stay where the Word of God is not proclaimed and preached correctly. So next week, we'll talk about what an elder is, what they look like, what their role is and how they're held accountable, because there must be accountability. And the week after that, we'll talk about what it looks like to be a member, what God expects, how it works. And then we'll end the series with where we go from here. I love you. I really do. It's a weird thing. I'm a West Coast guy; I never thought I'd live in Dallas. All the hair and Labs, the Golden Retrievers and Suburbans. But here we are.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I do want to pray against religion right now. In some strands, I want to pray against capitalism, not the economic system but how that idea has leaked into spiritual things. When that kind of rugged individualism that so marks a lot of good things about our nation is thrown into how God commands things to be, it isn't really a good thing. And so I pray that we might fight to belong somewhere. I pray that we would be very serious about walking in obedience for our own safety, for our own growth. God, I want to lay the Village at Your feet and just confess publicly and before You once again that my heart's desire is You and You glorified and nothing else. And if that's 150 of us, praise Your name. And so God, I pray that as you build us wide, You build us deep. And I pray that we might see progressive sanctification in all of us. There aren't any perfect people here; there are busted up, broken people who struggle here. There needs to always be that. But I just pray that we be marked by a progressive sanctification, a growth in holiness, that ten years from now there's evidence of You working in our hearts growing us into the fullness of all things. Help us. We need You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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