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The church is not an institution for perfect people. It is a sanctuary for sinners saved by grace, a nursery for God's sweet children to be nurtured and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep, the home for Christ's family. The church is the dearest place on earth.

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If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them. I love Acts 2, but we're going to be in Hebrews 13. If you have your Bible, go ahead and turn there or get there on your device. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. You can follow us with that Bible. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you.

We're in week three now of a series on the church called *The Dearest Place*. I have already, in the first two weeks, tried to dismantle the arguments against calling a series on the church *The Dearest Place*. I won't go into all of that again, but I will say what we've done so far is we have talked about what the church is. What we saw out of Ephesians 2 is that the church is a group of men and women. The church is a people; it's not a place. Places aren't sacred. People are sacred in Christianity. It's the people who are the church, not a place.

I stressed it by simply going, "You can head to Jerusalem, but you'll find the presence of God no more powerful there than you'll find it among us as his people. We are the dwelling place of God. God dwells among his people. The church is a people pulled from near and far. God graciously saved some of us in Sunday school, and he graciously saved some of us in addiction to drugs and alcohol and throwing ourselves away. In a wake of destruction, he came and rescued us, and he made a people that works itself out in a local congregation.

That local congregation is empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by the Word of God, and is held together by Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. What I unpacked then is that that holding together actually is our shared experience of grace. Without that shared experience of grace, we don't have a really good shot at walking with one another in such a way that the manifold wisdom of God is seen and marveled at and that we are salt and light to the world around us.

What I mean by that is when you experience grace, you're able to extend grace. If grace is just an idea, but God hasn't opened your heart to experience, then you rally around something else, and it's just not going to hold us together. If you want to talk justice issues, let me lay this before you. I believe the Bible would command us to fight injustice. I believe it's on the believer in Jesus Christ to take a stand against any and all kinds of injustices, but it's not what holds us together, because based on our backgrounds, our upbringing, and even at times our ethnicity, we will view different justices and injustices differently.

Really, you could attack injustice together, but because of backgrounds, see it very differently. That would lead to conflict and a going of the separate ways. It's not what holds us together; grace is what holds us together. The fact is that all of us have been told by God, "You're forgiven." That's what holds us together. It's what enables me to be patient with you, you to be patient with me, me to be gracious toward you, you to be gracious toward me.

It all has to do with the fact that we've experienced that. Having experienced it, we're now able to extend it, because we know great mercy has been shown to us, so we become more and more able to show great mercy to others. This is what the church is. It will always, at any given time, have immature people and mature people in it, and God and God alone can make that a house.

Praise God for that. Praise God that we always look a bit hypocritical to those outside of us. Can you imagine, if you're not a believer, the weight that would be put on any and all of us if everyone else here was perfect? Would you feel welcomed here at all? I'm the pastor of this joint. I would not feel welcomed here. I would stand up here like, "How am I supposed to tell these people...?" I wouldn't feel like I could. Because I know we're not and we're all under grace, I can boldly point us to grace.

This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We walked through that, being what the church is, empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by the Word of God, and held together by the grace of Jesus Christ, Christ the cornerstone. Last week, we talked about the nature of God's relationship with his church, the bride. The illustration the Bible gives us is marriage. Marriage is covenantal; it's not contractual. Contracts and covenants aren't the same.

Contracts rally around goods and services, and covenant is you giving yourself to something. You have to get this. If you have already forgotten or weren't here from last week, this becomes imperative to everything we'll discuss in this series. God's relationship with us is not contractual. It's not, "Here's a list of rules, but if you break those rules, I'm voiding the contract." That's not God's relationship with his church. God's relationship with his church is, "I'm going to give you me, and I'm enough regardless of what you're bringing to the table."

That's spectacular. That's why we love vows at weddings, because they're not contractual. We would hate them if they were contractual. It would suck all the romance out of it. It doesn't matter if you had the strings and the white gown and everybody dressed up. You would straight up derail, jack up a wedding if it came time for the vows and you began to use contractual language. "I'll bring home money if you'll clean the kitchen." "Okay. Well, I'll clean the kitchen..." Right? Nobody goes, "Oh, gosh. I'm so glad I'm here." You would hate that.

I said last week, "I'd just go get my gift out of the pile and take it. I'm not letting you sell it off during the divorce. I'm just going to get my money back. I'll take that blender home." We talked about that God's love toward us is covenantal. He gives us himself. Our response is obedience and giving ourselves back to the Lord, and he even empowers and enables that obedience. He fulfills the obligations of both sides of the covenant. That's unreal.

From there, we talked about then if God's relationship with his church is covenantal, what is our relationship to one another? We said it has to be covenantal. I used the illustration of my wife and I before we were married. We got in the same fight once every six to eight weeks. It was the identical fight. It was always around some other thing, but at its heart, it was the same fight. I asked one of my mentors, "David, I feel like I'm supposed to marry this woman, but here's the deal. About every eight weeks, we get in the same fight. I'm just kind of looking out and going, 'Okay, are we just going to be having this fight for the rest of our lives?'"

He looked me dead in my face and said, "You're going to fight with someone for the rest of your life. Do you want it to be Lauren? If you want to fight with Lauren for the rest of your life, then marry her. If you don't want to fight with Lauren for the rest of your life, then find who you are going to fight with for the rest of your life, but you're going to fight with someone." It was probably one of the first times in my life I had two emotions simultaneously happen that were at odds with one another.

One of them, I was crushed. Another is I was really excited. One, I was like, "Oh no," and then, "Oh yeah!" that literally happened. The same emotions all mixed in, and to this day, I've been fighting with Lauren. We're still at it probably every 10 to 12 weeks now, but we fight much fairer than we did back then and have

a better understanding of where one another are coming from. What I said is, "This is covenant love, and this is how our relationship should be with one another."

We walked through the 59 "one anothers." We're going to do it again today. Love one another. Serve one another. Greet one another. Rebuke one another. Correct one another. Build one another up. Outdo one another in honor. This is covenant language; it's not contractual. It's not, "If you don't do this, I'm going to leave." It's, "I'm going to become this type of person for you." That's the nature of the covenant our God has with us and that we share with one another.

I want to now take the next couple of weeks and talk about how the church is structured. Here's what I need you to do. Don't think, "Okay, he set up the relational side. Now he's getting into the structural side, because God doesn't set up structures sans relationship." Are you tracking that? It is important for you to know. What we're going to do now is we're going to move to how the church is ordered, because God has put definite structures and boundaries in place for your good.

Our culture doesn't like that, but what we call people in authority who have responsibility, who don't set boundaries and structures, they are people who neglect who they're over, and our God is not negligent. He is not indifferent toward you. He is not indifferent toward me; he is passionate about me through the blood of Christ and in that love has built structures so that I might flourish and be protected, and that I might mature and grow in wisdom and knowledge of who he is. We're going to talk about those structures this week and next.

I wish I could take this and build out a massive series on just basically the structures of the church. I don't have that kind of time, so we're going to do in two weeks just two topics. We're going to cover membership this week, and we're going to cover leadership, primarily elders, next week. That's how we're going to do it. Now I said the first week that we started this series that I have, you have, we have no authority other than the Word of God and the authority given by the Word of God. Does that make sense to you?

The Word of God is authoritative, but the Word of God also gives authority to institutions, places, and people that must also be submitted to, not as it is the Word of God, but because the Word of God has asked you to submit to that. Let me give you an illustration. When we were back at the Highland Village Campus, just one campus, we didn't have the multi-site model going on at that point. We were running six services, turning away from almost all six of them.

It was one of those weekends where we were just jammed, turning away at the parking lot. If you're here today, I would love to meet you. In my head, I love you. I just want to meet you. A brother came in, and could not get in. The greeters are like, "Sorry, it's full." Our staff had already left and given up their seats

for other people coming in. They were all jammed up in the sound booth. We were already breaking the law. If they would have counted heads, we would have probably gotten in trouble, speaking of authority issues.

In the end, this brother had no framework for being turned away from a church 10 minutes before the scheduled start time. He had no framework for that, so he just started getting heated. One of our security guys (I don't want to out him, but his name is Andy, walked over to this man and just said, "Is there a problem?" He grabbed his Bible and was like, "You show me in this book where it says you can turn me away." Then he chucked his Bible across the foyer.

Andy, who is carrying a weapon, just said, "Well, sir, you have the Good Book, and you have the city book. The Good Book doesn't have anything to say, but the city book says we're full." First of all, kudos to Andy. I would have probably tased him. That's probably how I would have gone out. "Huh? How about now? You didn't see that one coming to church." That probably would have happened. I have a really dark heart, all right. I'm being grown. Andy just kind of lays it out. What he said was true.

The Word of God, Romans 13, says that authorities have been set up, governmental authorities have been set up for our good, so if you're anti-boundary, I would love to take you to a couple of countries around the world and see how much you start to cling and love boundaries. I'd like to take you to a couple of places globally and let you rail against structures and authorities. Right? No, boundaries are given for our good. The Word of God is authoritative, but also gives authority to certain institutions, organizations, and people.

Since this is true, if we're going to talk about membership, here's what we have to ask. *Is church membership biblical?* If the only authority we have is the Word of God and the authority the Word of God gives, then we have to go to the Word of God or to whom has the authority from the Word of God in order to answer this question. Luckily, we don't have to go to the authority he assigns; he handles it himself.

There is not an explicit text in the Bible that says, "You must join a church." That verse does not exist. That would be awesome, but it doesn't exist. Now, there is enough biblical commanding occurring in the Scriptures that I believe it leaves no doubt that obedience to God and obedience to the Word of God demands, not suggests, but *demand*s that you join a local congregation in a way that's much more robust than your attendance on the weekend.

Let me show you. We're in Hebrews 13. We're going to pick it up in verse 17. It's just going to start with a very difficult word. My first argument for church membership or, I believe, the Bible's first argument for church membership is actually how the church is to be structured. Let's look at verse 17. What's the first

word? **"Obey..."** You can do better than that. What's the first word? **"Obey..."** We're going to talk about this, because this is crazy. I'm nervous. I'm starting to sweat, all right. This is not an easy topic.

Let's do it. Like I said, I'm just going to kind of stand on this. If you have a problem, it's not with me. **"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."** This sets up an interaction of relational structure that most of us don't care for. Here's what it is. I want to just kind of file the thing open here.

When we join churches, we're not thinking, "I'm going to submit to the group of leaders that are over and in this church." We don't think that. We think, "I like this preaching. I like this music. This place is kind of cool. I love how they do this. Aren't these seats comfortable? I like how many options and service times we have. Their children's program is great." That's the kind of stuff we're thinking about, but here's what the Bible just said. There are leaders in the church you are to submit to.

Let's chat. We're talking membership here and whether or not it's biblical. What leaders? There are a lot of Christian leaders out there, aren't there? Probably the easiest example, the easiest target for me is just to kind of talk about Westboro. There are a bunch of leaders and elders at that church. Do you have to submit to them? Are we heading out to picket some funerals? The Bible is clear. "Obey. Submit." But to whom?

Then, I'll tell you for me, as an elder... We'll get into our kind of structure here a little bit here and then a lot more next week. As an elder, do you know what kind of crushing weight this is? You think you're like, "Oh, I don't think I really like to submit." Well, I don't know that I want to be held accountable for 9,000 people. Do you want to talk about sweating myself to sleep sometimes, asking God to be merciful, asking him to give me wisdom, asking our team for boldness, for insight into the Word of God, and courage to do what we would have us do concerning your souls?

You don't think this is a crushing weight on all those who would take seriously shepherding the people of God? Who am I to lead? When I say, "I," in our time together today, I'm talking about we, the elders of The Village Church. Who are we to lead? Are we responsible for all the Christians out there? Am I responsible for everyone? No, I don't believe so. Now, am I to be brotherly to all believers in Christ? Absolutely. Am I to engage wherever I can? Absolutely, but if there are leaders who members are to submit to and obey...

Golly! I almost just prefer, almost just take seriously, "Gosh, that would just be so much better." But no. **"Obey...submit to..."** then I get to like, "Oh, gosh. I don't know how they're going to receive that. Then I read the next line, and I'm like, "Sheesh, I have to stand in front of God and give an account." Now, will grace cover that? Absolutely, but does it change that God is going to hold me and the rest of our elders

ultimately responsible for how we shepherded you as under shepherds? No. Will I hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"? I believe I will.

God has entrusted to me and to the elders of this church what is extremely precious to him, what reveals his manifold wisdom. Sometimes I'm like, "Man, I'd rather not have that responsibility. Can't I just teach? I'm good at preaching. Can I just preach? Let some other brothers... Can I just not be an elder here? Can I just kind of be the preacher/teacher guy and not sit under this? Preaching and teaching is easy compared to this.

The first argument I would make for membership is that God says there is leadership you must obey and submit to, and that for those of us who are leaders, there is a specific people we are called to lead in such a way that we will be held accountable for how we went about leading them, shepherding them, encouraging them, spurring them on toward love and good deeds.

The first argument from the Bible is actually a structural one. Do you see how it's still relational? You obey and submit, but leaders are to love and shepherd those who are obeying and submitting. It's not heavy-handed. It's not controlling. It's understanding that I have to give an account to Dad for how I took care of his bride. I'll be straight with you.

If we ever had a babysitter, and we kind of laid out, "We want the kids in bed at 8:30. Please don't give them a lot of sugar. If you could just clean up a little bit the mess the kids make before we get home, that would be awesome." If I got home, and the television was gone, and a kid was missing, and there was icing all over the ground, and it was evident that things were... I would have a major problem there, because I would have trusted someone with something that is most precious to me.

That's how I feel being your pastor. God has handed me this thing he loves so much that blood was spilt. The Garden of Gethsemane, sweat drops of blood, agony, screams as nails were driven through his hands and his feet, being mocked, absorbing all of that wrath was for *you*, so you might be born, so you might be made spiritually alive. God, seeing it good and right in his own sight, handed you over to the elders of this church to care for, to mature, to nourish, and encourage on toward maturity.

That's serious, serious stuff, and it means I better be ferociously committed to you, and it means you had better trust us well, and honestly that we earn that trust. I told you in the message last week, if elders refuse to do their job, the Bible gives you clear grounds on how to confront them and how to press them and how ultimately, if they get outside the bounds of the gospel, to move on and find a church that robustly preaches the gospel and will love you, shepherd you, and care for you well.

The second text is 1 Corinthians 5. There is an argument for how the church is structured, and I would say along with that structure, there is an argument for how church discipline plays out. I just want to warn you that this is a difficult text, but I'm going to try to explain it in a way that would be helpful. We're going to pick it up in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 5.

**"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. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."** Let's talk about what is happening here. You have a son in a sexual relationship with more than likely a stepmother, not his birth mother, but more than likely his stepmother. The church has rejoiced in this, because isn't God's grace grand that God's grace would cover such debauchery?

Paul says, "Are you serious? You should mourn. Are you this arrogant? You should mourn this!" I've said this to you before. God does not make sin safe. Grace doesn't make sin safe. Can you be forgiven? Absolutely. Can you be restored? Absolutely. Is there collateral damage to rebellion? Almost always. In this situation, you see people rejoicing in something they shouldn't be rejoicing in. They should rather be mourning. We'll talk more about that here in a second. Let's keep going. Verse 3:

**"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."**

Again, I need to stop here. I want you to see, like we covered last week in Matthew 18, when it comes to matters of church discipline, and when it comes to matters of removing someone from fellowship, this text is far more aggressive than Matthew 18. What we looked at last week is that we treat them as Gentiles and tax-collectors, as in allowing them to sit and allowing them to be a part of body life. They just can't participate in the Table, and we are to treat them as though they are not believers.

This is, "Get this brother out. He is *not* welcome." What I want to point to here is both in the Matthew 18 passage and in this passage, the goal and the hope is always restoration. The desire is that by turning this brother over for the destruction of his flesh by the Devil that he might repent and be saved on the day of the Lord. I think maybe ways this will make better sense to you...

If you didn't know (I think almost all of us know), I had a brain tumor taken out of my head almost four years ago now. That was awful. I'm just going to throw that out. It was just *awful*. There was no real part of it that I thought, "This will be great as enabling me to minister in the future." The surgery lasted close to



eight hours. I woke up lacking certain cognitive skills and a lot of weakness on my left side. I had to do rehab. I found out in a couple of weeks that I was probably going to be dead in a couple of years.

The good news was, before I die, they were going to poison me quite a bit, and then I would get to die poisoned. In the middle of that, they took a saw. (If you're sensitive, I apologize for this.) They cut open my skull, and then he took a scalpel, and he cut out a piece of my brain. He put my skull back on, flapped that thing up, and sewed it instead of stapling it, because he knew I was on stage. I still think that's kind of funny. He was like, "Oh, I don't want to staple his head. People will think that's grotesque, so let me just suture it." Like that's better. "Hey..." You know.

In the end here, what he did, as awful as it was...look at me...saved my life. God used it to save my life. In the same way, church discipline often carries this function. "Let me wound you so you might live." I pressed real hard last week on the phrase, "that you might win your brother." This week, I want to point you to this phrase, "that he might be saved in the day of the Lord." This isn't an arrogant move. This isn't an aggressive move. This is a slow move. This is a compassionate move, and it's one, according to the apostle, that should be made with mourning, with tears, with gut-wrought, with just a desire that it could go any other way but this.

"For the sake of your soul, brother, for the sake of your soul, you're not welcome." There are some caveats here we have to really look at, so you know this isn't what we're talking about in Matthew 18. This is something far more serious and, in fact, something I believe we've only done twice in my 10 years here. Matthew 18, really hundreds of times. The good news is most of those stop after the first or second meeting. Some of them make their way all the way up, and people have to be removed from membership, but most...

Matthew 18 is perpetually happening here if we're a healthy body. If we love one another well, Matthew 18 will be happening weekly. You're just not going to get to the back parts of 18. This is something altogether different, and I want you to look at what he says here in verse 6.

**"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."**

Let's keep reading. **"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people..."** Now don't go, "I'm out." Don't do it. Let's keep reading. **"...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."**

**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.'**"

Now, again, this creates some mind space we don't have a lot of categories for, so let me kind of shape it for you. The picture here is not of a repentant brother struggling. That's not the picture. The picture we have is the picture of a brother who is actively sleeping with his stepmother and rejoicing as though God's grace allows him to do that and is asking others to celebrate God's grace in light of his debauchery. Paul said, "No, no, no, no, no. That kind of wickedness will work its way through the entire church, and the holiness of my people will come into question. Purge that brother from your midst."

As harsh as all this sounds, you know this to be true. When you're around people who are serious about the things of God, serious about the Word of God, serious about prayer, serious about evangelism, just love the Lord, don't you feel yourself rise a little bit, like you want that? You're encouraged in the Lord. You feel confident in the Lord. You're growing bold in your ability to know the Word of God and apply the Word of God and herald the good news of the gospel to those around you.

In the same way, if you are with brothers and sisters who are somewhat ashamed, somewhat meek, far more worldly, a bit more immature, is not the temptation maybe not to sell out but to be hesitant about being more mature? You don't want to be seen as that guy who goes, "Maybe we should pray about that," and have eyes roll. "Well that reminds me of what I read in the Scriptures." You just don't want to be seen as that. Yeah, we're all tempted to do that.

Where you have a brother or sister who is a part of the covenant community of faith who is celebrating their sin and encouraging the body to celebrate their sin, then the role is not just, "You're welcome in our gathering, but you can't participate in the Lord's Supper, and we're going to treat you as a Gentile and tax-collector, i.e. an unbeliever." It's actually, "You're not welcome here. If we find out you're going somewhere else, we're probably going to let them know also."

There are two times that has happened in my 10 years here. That's it. Actually, I'm grateful to the Lord for that. The first one was... I'll just tell you this scenario. The first was a man who was preying on our young women. He was identifying and finding our single women who had what I would call (hopefully I don't get myself in trouble here) some self-esteem issues, were looking and needy for male attention. He was more than glad to be that male attention.

It really creeped out some of our women to where they came and complained to us, so we... I mean, we take that junk seriously. We pulled this brother aside and kind of made a list of, "Here are our expectations of you in this place. If you're going to be in this place, here's what we're going to ask of you." Then he kind of broached that, so we sat him down again. We tightened it up. "We, as the elders, have been given the authority from the Bible." I don't have a verse that says, "If some old pervert predator is hanging out in your church, throw him out." What I do have is the Word of God giving me authority (and by me I mean the elders) to take care of the flock of God.

We sat him down and said, "This is the service you can come to. No other service, and you don't call or talk to any of our women before you talk to us first." He broke it again, and he's gone. This is one of the examples. Another example is kind of along those same lines. We just had an abusive dude. We're just not going to have an unrepentant man beating his wife in our church. It's just not going to happen. These are the only two instances I can give you where a man was celebrating his sin and asking all of us to celebrate his sin with him.

At that point, the role isn't, "Keep coming." Surely you know this. Right? Even if you're an unbeliever, this should make sense to you. Would you let someone you knew, had displayed every sign, every action of hurting those who are under your care, your wife, your children, your family members, would you knowingly say, "You know what. Just keep coming and spending the night"? No, you wouldn't. If you would, you're a fool.

In the same way, one of the weights, one of the major weights that falls on us as elders is this also. We have to make these kinds of calls. If you knew how much of our week is spent on this and people in different parts of this process, you'd pray for us a lot more than you do. I can tell you that. Here's my question on the question of membership. How can there be an *out* if there's not an *in*? If there is no *in*, how can there be an *out*? Are you with me? How do you remove a brother and tell him he's not welcome if there is no place he would be welcomed?

I would argue that the Bible argues for church membership based on her structure and based on how God has decided to protect his people. With that said, where the Bible doesn't answer all of our questions that I want to be honest about how The Village has landed and why we land there. There are those who believe in church membership who do not practice as we do formal church membership. I have great pastor friends. All the guys I know in the UK don't do formalized membership.

Basically, their thing is, "If you come here, you're in." They'll just do church discipline on anybody. You're like, "I don't even know if I've decided to join here." It doesn't matter. "Repent." That's non-formalized membership. There is nothing sinful or wrong about it. In fact, I believe the structure, obedience and

submission as well as protection and maturation can occur without a formalized membership process. Here at The Village, we do formalized membership. Here's what that means.

That means we have a covenant member class. All we want to do in that class is put all our cards on the table. We don't want you to become a member and then two years from now go, "We believe what?" If you're thinking about it in an analogy, it's kind of like dating. We're going to just be who we are on the first date. We're not going to try to pretty ourselves up at all; we're just going to lay it out on the table. "Here's what we believe theologically. Here's how we operate philosophically."

What we're going to do for those of you who are sports people, is we're going to go, "This is our defense. We're running 3-4. This is our base defense. This is how you get involved. This is how we're structured. This is what we believe. Here are the positions there are to play in the 3-4. That's our base package. Do you want to know how disciples are made at The Village Church? This is how they're made. Do you want to know what we believe about salvation? This is how we believe salvation works. Do you want to know what we believe about the roles of men and women? This is what we believe. Do you want to know what we believe about the Holy Spirit? Here's what we believe about the Holy Spirit."

We're just going to lay it out there, and we're going to answer your questions. We're going to give to you a document we call our covenant. In that covenant, it's basically nothing added to the Word of God. In fact, if you wrung that thing out, it would just pour New Testament and Old Testament all over the ground. It is what is a church, what is covenant, what does the Bible command of elders, what does the Bible command of members, and then how are those relationships going to interact here at The Village? After that class, we're going to ask you to read through that covenant, and then one of our members will sit down and basically interview.

It's not cool points; it's, "Are you really a believer, as best we can tell, and have you actually read through the covenant? Do you actually understand what we believe? This in a very real way will protect the unity of the church." At that point, they'll sign off, and you are a covenant member of The Village Church. Then annually, we do a renewal. The reason we do that... Once again, you have to hear my heart. The reason we do covenant renewal is because we take very seriously God's command on us to shepherd you.

Do you know what came out of covenant renewal? Hundreds of phone calls came out of covenant renewal. We don't have to do that. We take Hebrews 13 seriously. Man, I'm on the phone with some of you. In fact, it was really fun for me, because I got to call some of you I have never met. "This is Matt." "Matt who?" "Matt Chandler." "No, it's not." "No, I swear to you this is Matt Chandler." Here's what we learned in some of those questions. Some of us were just very uninformed, and some of us had a lot of legitimate concerns we got to hear and address.

It's a legitimate feedback loop meant to help us shepherd you and care for you. We'll do it again this next fall. You'll start to hear it again in early fall, and we'll do it again. We're going to do it every year so I can know, we can know who we're leading, and you can be reminded of the covenant you've entered into with the people of The Village Church and the elders of The Village Church. That's how we do it here. Is that better than having no formalized membership process? I think so for dozens of reasons that I don't think necessarily matter here.

What you get handed in our covenant is a teaching document. Pick it up any time you want, and you'll know how to hold me accountable. Do you want to know whether or not I'm doing my job, whether or not the elders are doing their job? It's in the covenant. We didn't write you in; we wrote us in. We're members first, which is why I'm starting with members before we teach on elders, because there is nothing that is asked of members that is not also asked of elders.

It's simply a teaching document so you might see what God has asked of you, what God has asked of us, and what God has asked of those who are elders here. There are other evidences. I'm trying not to go long here. Acts 2:37-47 is a numerical record of those who have professed Christ and been filled with the Holy Spirit and acknowledged that the church was tracking its growth there in 47. Later in the book of Acts, you see elections take place in order to address a specific problem and accusation.

Romans 16:1-16 appears to be an awareness of who a church member is, and then 1 Timothy 5:3-16 is a program designed at the church in Ephesus to meet the need of widows and what they must be doing and where they must be to qualify for that program there in the church. This is just more evidence, but I think the big rocks are structure and discipline, how God plans to care for us. Let me end our time together again by just reading through the "one anothers." If that's how we're going to interact, I just think we can't hear this enough.

In the New Testament alone. Love one another. Serve one another. Accept one another. Strengthen one another. Help one another. Encourage one another. Care for one another. Forgive one another. Submit to one another. Commit to one another. Build trust with one another. I'm hoping to do that in this sermon. Build trust with one another. Live in harmony with one another. Confess to one another. Do not pass judgment on one another. Do not slander one another. Instruct one another. Grieve one another. Admonish one another. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Meet with one another. Agree with one another. Be concerned for one another. Be humble to one another in love. Be compassionate to one another. Do not be consumed by one another. I said this last week. I can't say it enough. We're going to disagree, but there's a way that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are to

disagree with one another. If we spend any time on the web at all on Christian blogs, you know we really stink at this. We don't devour one another. That's not what we do.

When we disagree, we disagree in a way that shows that we have been shown grace, that we've experienced mercy, and as we have had that heaped upon us, we will definitely extend it to others. I have a hard time trusting brothers who consume other brothers. Do not anger one another. Do not lie to one another. Do not grumble to one another. Give preference to one another. Be at peace with one another. Sing to one another. We're about to do that here. Be of the same mind to one another. Comfort one another. Be kind to one another. Live in peace with one another, and carry one another's burdens.

Again, covenantal not contractual (I'm going to say this for the rest of the series), which means, "I'm not demanding this of you. I am trying to be this for you, and if you would come that same way, we have a real shot at something beautiful here, but if you have come demanding this of others, I'm just going to put you on the clock. It will only be a matter of time until you move on to get in the same fight you get in here with some other fools. I'm just inviting you in to fight with fools here, myself included.

Covenant means, "I'm going to, by the Holy Spirit's power, try to be this for you. If there is reciprocity, it will be a lot easier. If there's not, it doesn't change. This is what God is asking for me." Me greeting, loving, encouraging is about obedience to God as he floods my heart with love for you. I think that's going to make it easier for you to be reciprocal in it where you're not loved, not greeted, not encouraged, not rebuked, not corrected, not..." If all I ever gave was flowery sermons that didn't press on your heart, wouldn't you eventually get bored of that? Maybe it's just me. I just eventually get bored of that.

I just know myself to know I'm not awesome, and if you're telling me I'm awesome, you're a liar. This is good news, guys. Rest in your lack of awesomeness. Just snuggle up into the chest of God Almighty who knows how weak and fragile you are. May we strive to be this kind of people to one another, and may the power of the Holy Spirit, the Ghost empower these things here. Let's pray.

Father, I know there are some who are in a season where this is easy even delightful to hear. For some of us, that's not the season we're in. Where there are men and women who are battered and bruised in here, Holy Spirit, will you now do your work where something has been misheard or fear has crept in or the Enemy has begun to lie. Would you, as David cried out, break the jaw of our Enemy? Would you give ears to hear? Might this be good news to all?

Help us be these kind of people. I pray that you would move us forward in obedience, that you would move us forward in glad-heartedness to obey and submit, that you would continue to protect the hearts of the elder board here, that they would continue to feel the weight of Hebrews 13, they would continue to take

very seriously to shepherd the flock of God in this place. Might we feel the weight of the seriousness of this subject and give our hearts gladly to your commands. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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