

What is a Church Member

Acts 5:1-11

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 14, 2017

Before we get started this morning, I want to say “Happy Mother’s Day” to all our moms in the room. I want to say a special word of encouragement to the young families that are with us today. Many of you are still taking your kids to Sunday School, but we are so glad you are here. As one of you, I know that it’s not easy to get your kids to church every Sunday. It’s a battle. It’s tough. It’s hard work. And yet you do it week-in and week-out. I just want to tell you that you are among friends. Our people love seeing you here, don’t they? I can testify to this. When our family first moved to Canada, I came early, and Katie and the kids came on a Saturday night. They had a sixteen hour trip, or something like that, and they got to Chilliwack at 7:00 at night. The next morning we were in church. It was crazy. We were so out of it. But the people of this church came alongside us and loved us and encouraged us. And I know they will do the same thing for you. You are among friends here. These people will come alongside you and love on you and be an encouragement to you as well. I know they will.

And to tie that in to the sermon, the word “commitment” has fallen on hard times today. There aren’t a lot of people who are doing what these young families are doing. The story is told of two men in a village who got into an argument over a goat – over who the goat belonged to. So the first man went to the village chief and argued his case. The chief said, “You are absolutely right. The goat belongs to you.” And after hearing that, the second man went to the chief and argued his case, and the chief said, “You’re absolutely right. The goat belongs to you.” Finally, the chief’s wife said, “How can you say that? You gave the goat to both men.” To which he said, “You are absolutely right. The goat belongs to you.”

I think a lot of people act that way today. They aren’t committed to anything. They can’t make up their mind. They waver all the time. They go back and forth between this and that and this and that. Just consider our marriages. People don’t commit to marriage anymore. According to a recent study in CBC News, four out of ten marriages in Canada end in divorce. Four out of ten. The article says:

The traditional definition of family is changing in Canada, with 4 in 10 marriages ending in divorce, according to a new study.

For the first time in Canadian history, there are more unmarried adults than legally married ones... And, to make matters worse, a substantial portion of those who are already married will not make it. They will be divorced by the end of this year.

The article goes on to list several reasons for this. But at the end of the day, we simply don’t want to stay married anymore. The most important commitment you could ever make in your life, your commitment to your spouse, is being spurned by many people in our society today.

And it’s not just our marriages. You see the same thing happening in business. Each year in Canada there are thousands of lawsuits filed over a breach in someone’s business commitments.

Someone didn't keep their word. Someone didn't do what they said they would do. They said they would do this, but they did this instead. They said they would provide this, but they provided this instead, so they are being sued. They broke a commitment. They broke someone's trust. There is even a page on the "Business Vancouver" website where you can scroll down and see it happening in our community.

And it's not just business. You see the same thing happening with lifestyles. It has been estimated that the average person in Canada and the U.S. will change homes 12 different times before settling down somewhere. They will pick up and move 12 different times. And they will do the same thing with their careers. The average person will change careers 15 different times. He will jump from job to job to job. They will do the same thing with their phones. The average person changes cell phones 20 different times. They do the same thing with their cars. The average person changes cars 12 different times. We don't stay committed to anything anymore. We don't hang in there and stick it out with anything. Not with our marriages, not with our jobs, and not even with our cell phones.

I think it is so tragic, because a lot of that mentality has found its way into the church. The way we handle our marriages and our jobs and our phones is becoming indicative of the way that we handle the church. We church hop like it's nobody's business. We change churches like it's going out of style. It has been said that the typical Christian in North America has two cars, two kids, one house, and half a dozen churches that they used to attend. And it's true. We change churches at the drop of a hat. A hundred-year-old man was once asked, "Why do you go to church? You are so old. You have so many health issues. Why do you still come here?" He said, "Because I want everyone to know which side I'm on." We can't tell which side people are on anymore.

We can't tell what they are committed to. They go to this church, then they go to that church, then they go to that one. They hang out with this group, then they hang out with this group, then they hang out with that group. And when they come, they want to know, "What do I get out of this? What's in it for me? What's in it for my children? What's in it for my family? How are you going to meet our needs? How are you going to make me happy?"

I remember talking to a man, not at this church but another one, who told me that he heard that I was the new pastor, and he was stopping by to see if he liked me or not. No pressure. No worries. He said that they liked the previous guy, but that he wanted to stay around to see if he liked me or not. After that, I never saw him again. I guess he didn't like me. A lot of people bring that kind of attitude into the church. "What's in it for me? What do I get out of this?" And that raises the question, is that okay? Is it okay to stay uncommitted to the church? Is it okay to ask, "What's in it for me?" Is it okay to leave as soon as you don't like the pastor anymore?

Turn in your Bibles to Acts 5. As you are turning there, if you are joining us for the first time this morning, we are on the tail end of a series called "Foundations of the Church," where we are looking at some foundational or fundamental issues of the Church. We have been on this series since January and so far, we have talked about what the church is and what the church does. We have talked about how the church is different from the world, and how it is different from the parachurch. We have talked about the messiness of the church, and the necessity of the church

and the importance of the church. Last time, I said that if you understand all of this, you will join the church. You won't just show up and ask, "What's in it for me?" You won't just come until you don't like the pastor anymore. That's not okay. That's not alright. You have to join. You have to make a commitment. There is no greater place to see this than in the book of Acts.

Acts is the history of Jesus' commitment to the church. From start to finish, it is a history of how Jesus and the Apostles devoted themselves to the church. They baptized people and put them in churches. They didn't put them on a mountaintop. They didn't put them in a cave where they could be all alone by themselves. They put them in churches. They put them with God's people. They did the same thing when they evangelized - when they led people to the Lord. They didn't leave them all to themselves. They didn't give them a pat on the back and say, "See you later. God be with you." They put them in the church. They got them involved in a local body of believers. They did the same thing when they taught. They taught in churches. They did the same thing when they sang. They sang in churches. They did the same thing when they fellowshiped. They fellowshiped in churches. It was all about the church in the Book of Acts.

If you remember your Bible history for a minute, you will remember that the church is the only institution that Jesus promised to build. Matthew 16:18 says, "I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." The book of Acts shows how He did that. Now we can't get into everything in this book, but before we get into chapter 5, let me give you a quick overview to show you what it says about the church, particularly church membership – people's commitment to the church. In Acts 2, Peter preaches the first Christian sermon at Pentecost and 3000 were saved. We know it was 3000 because someone counted them. That is usually how numbers were determined in the Bible. Someone counted them. That is usually how numbers were determined in the Bible. Someone went around with a clipboard or a tablet and numbered the people to see who was in and who was out of the church.

You see the same thing happening again in Acts 4:4: "But many of those who had heard the message of Peter believed and the number of the men came to be about 5000." So now the numbers are growing. Now the church is getting bigger, from 3000 to 5000.

You see the same thing happening again in Acts 11:21: "And the hand of the Lord was with them [after Peter witnessed to Cornelius] and a large number who believed turned to the Lord." Now it is just a "large number." Now the numbers are so big that you can't count them anymore. But the point is that they numbered the people. They kept a tally to see who was committed to the church. They kept some kind of membership roster to see who was actually a part of this thing, to see which side they were on. They also kept lists.

That was another way they handled church membership in the book of Acts: they kept lists of people in the church. Not lists of everyone, for obvious reasons. The church was under persecution, so the last thing they wanted to do was to write out everyone's name for the authorities to find. But they did keep a list of some things. They kept a list of deacons in Acts 6. That was the first list that we see – a list of deacons.

We also see a list of widows. Stepping outside the book of Acts, 1 Timothy 5:9 says: "A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than 60 years old, having been the wife of one man,

and having a reputation for good works.” They listed out noteworthy Christians in Romans 16. They did it again in Colossians 4. They did it again in 2 Timothy 4. All of that wasn’t in the book of Acts, but it ties directly to it. As the church grew, it kept lists, to see who was committed – to see who was directly involved. Finally it disciplined people.

That was another way the church handled membership: it disciplined people. Which brings us to Acts 5. Acts 5 is the first instance of church discipline in the Bible. It was the first time that someone was ever disciplined or thrown out of the church. Interestingly enough, it was also the first time that someone sinned in the church – that we know of, anyway. John Calvin said that before this, the church looked more like a group of angels than men, because everyone did what they were supposed to. Everyone acted like angels. But that all changes now - now sin enters the body for the first time. Now Satan gets involved. This is also the first time someone dies in the church.

You would think that the first time someone died in the church, it would be a martyr’s death – a noble death – but it wasn’t. It was a shameful death. It was a hypocrite’s death, which means that it was the first instance of hypocrisy in the church. This was the first time someone tried to be a hypocrite in the church. The first time they tried to fake it. This is a story of many firsts. It is a story of new beginnings – dark beginnings. It sheds a lot of light on the issue of church membership. So let’s read what it says, and we’ll talk about it together.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.” Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.” And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

To explain this a little bit, and to see what it says about our topic, I want to you see several requirements for membership in this passage. If you want to join the church, there are several requirements that you have to meet. The first one is this: You have to commit. You have to choose sides. You can’t stay on the fence all the time. You can’t stay undecided. They say that

the only things in the middle of the road are yellow streaks and dead skunks, and it is the same way with the church. You have to commit.

If you look down in verses 1-2, it says that Ananias was committed, albeit with wrong motives: “But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

We are not told a lot about Ananias or Sapphira in this passage. This is the only time they are mentioned in the Bible. Apparently they were involved in the church in Jerusalem and they wanted to contribute to it, so they gave some of their land. In the First Century, people didn’t always put their money in banks – they often put it in land. They bought up huge tracts of property and when they needed cash, they sold it. Ananias and Sapphira did that here, which took some commitment. This was not a small thing to do. We will get into why they did this in a moment. Ananias had to go down to the land office, pull out a deed, mark off what he would sell, find a buyer, find a lawyer, draw up a contract, get it approved, get it filled out, get it closed, take the cash, and bring it to Peter and the Apostles. This was not a small thing to do. This took a lot of work. Ananias didn’t just come into church and say, “What’s in it for me? How are you going to meet my needs?” He made a commitment.

I have told you the difference between the pig and the chicken: when it comes to making breakfast, the pig is committed, while the chicken just contributes. Ananias was committed. He was in it whole-hog. Which leads me to ask, are you committed? Are you in it whole-hog? Are you doing what Ananias did here? Not the bad part of it, obviously, but the good part. Are you giving like Ananias did? Are you sacrificing like he did? Are you serving others like he did? Or do you come to church and ask, “What’s in it for me?”

A church website recently published an article asking what would happen if football coaches approached their job the way youth ministers do, and they said,

I have often wondered what would happen if football coaches approached their work the way most youth ministers do. For example, I wonder what would happen if when a player was too busy to show up for practice, the coach simply said, “We will miss you. I hope you come back next week.” I wonder what impact that would have on his performance. I wonder what impact that would have on the team.

What would the coach say when the parents called and told him: “My son says that practice is boring, and he doesn’t want to come anymore. Could you make it a little more fun for him? Could you make it a little more entertaining? And, by the way, you might want to talk to the coach down the street. He seems to have the right idea. Maybe you could learn something from him.”

Do you approach the church like that? Like a disgruntled teenager? Do you come expecting us to change everything when it is no longer fun for you? Listen friends, ministry costs you something.

If you join any church, it will cost you something. As one author said, “Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.” Ministry by nature of what it is is demanding. It is costly. You can add to this that we are in a church plant, which means this is extra costly. Church plants are hard. They are messy. It takes time to get everything to work properly. It takes time to get it to run smoothly. It takes time and sweat and tears to make all the parts fit together. Are you willing to give that? Are you willing to give it your time, sweat, and tears? Are you willing to stay in there when the going gets tough? If you aren’t, then this won’t work. If you are not, this church will fail. I couldn’t find the numbers in Canada, but in the United States, something like 80% of church plants ultimately fail and of those that succeed, most don’t get past 100 people, because it takes a lot of work. It is not for wimps. It is not for skunks and yellow streaks. To succeed at it, you must be committed. You must be willing to go the distance.

In the ruins of Ancient Greece, archaeologists found the medallion of a bull standing in between an altar and a plough. Beneath it were the words, “Whatever it takes.” You must be willing to give whatever it takes: you must be willing to go to the altar or the plough. Our Church Covenant highlights this.

The document we will give you this morning on your way out the door has several sections that start off with, “I covenant to do this,” or “I will diligently strive to do this,” or “I agree by God’s grace to do this,” because that’s what it will take. It will take God’s grace. It will take diligence and a covenant to hang in there and make this work. This is what we are asking you to give.

That leads to another requirement for church membership in this passage: integrity. You have to have integrity to join a church. Not only do you need to be committed, but you need to be committed for the right reasons, with the right motives. Ananias didn’t have that. That was his problem here. He gave land, but he didn’t do it with the right motive. If you read on in verses 3-4, apparently, Ananias had some ulterior motives for giving land to the church. He wanted to tell everyone that he gave it all away, when in reality he didn’t. He kept some for himself – which wasn’t a problem, because if you notice, Peter asks him in verse 4, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?” In other words, it was okay for Ananias to keep some of his own land. It was okay for him to keep some of the profit for himself. But you can’t lie about it – that was the problem. You can’t mislead people with it.

Sky West Airlines tells the story of a passenger who was late for a flight that had his bags on it, and to get them back, he just blurted out the first thing that came into his mind: “There is a bomb in there!” You shouldn’t do that. It’s not wrong to be late for a flight, but you shouldn’t say there is a bomb in there. It is not wrong to sell your property and keep some of it for yourself. None of us puts all of our money into the offering plate. But you shouldn’t lie about it. The point is that a church member has to have integrity. That’s the principle here. He has to mean what he says. He can’t lie to make himself look better. He can’t lie to make people like him. “Way to go, Ananias! You are such a wonderful Christian.” You can’t do that.

Here is why: people trust you in a church, don’t they? They trust you in a church. They take you at your word. They believe what you say. If you think about it, everything in the church is voluntary. Everything is given. The money is given. The property is given. The effort and time and energy of the people are given. You don’t get paid to be here. You don’t get a check for this.

When I was in Los Angeles, we had a guy in our Single's Ministry who stole lots of money from our people. He was on drugs although nobody knew it. He was addicted to painkillers, and he was stealing from the people and using the money to buy drugs. When it was found out, they were devastated. They were crushed, because they trusted this guy. They put their faith in him. When he said that he needed money, they gave him money. When he said that he needed help, they gave him help, and he betrayed them, and it crushed them. It hurt a lot of people. Some of you have heard of the name Jimmy Swaggart. He was a famous preacher in the 1980s who was indicted for real estate fraud. He was sent to prison for it. One of my professors in university was his PR agent, and he told me that just about ruined his faith. It shattered it, because he had to testify against him in court. Can you imagine?

My friends, integrity is everything in the church. It is all you have. If you lose this, you lose everything. If you don't have this, you don't have anything. So let me ask you, can you be trusted? Do you have integrity? Are you the kind of person who means what he says, and says what he means? When people talk to you, do they know that you are trustworthy? Do they know that you speak the whole truth? The word "integrity" means whole, by the way. An integer is a "whole" number. So a man with integrity is a "whole man." Are you a whole man? Are you the same person at work that you are at home and at church? I just told you that church plants require commitment, but they also require integrity. People are going to have to trust you to make this work. They are going to have to know that you mean what you say. What is the greatest criticism that people bring against the church? The church is full of hypocrites, right? You can't be a hypocrite and make this work. You can't be a hypocrite and see Grace Fellowship Church succeed. What they think about you will ultimately reflect on what they think about us, amen? If they think that you are a liar, then they will think that we are all liars. They will think this church is a lie. One big lie – a hoax. But, on the other hand, if they think that you tell the truth, they will think we all tell the truth. The church is true. The Gospel is true. The church is a reflection of you. It is whatever you make it to be. So you have to have integrity. This is why our Church Covenant says:

I will diligently strive to maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus, through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines. My relationship will be evident through my consistent participation in worship services, communion, service, and a life that glorifies Jesus Christ.

We say that because we want you to have integrity, We want you to be consistent or regular – regular in your Bible reading, regular in your prayers, regular in your fellowship and practice of the spiritual disciplines. The Covenant also says, "I agree, by God's grace, to walk in holiness, as an act of worship to Jesus Christ." That's what we want for you. We want you to walk in holiness.

That leads to another requirement for church membership in this passage: Accountability. You have to have accountability to join a church. You have to open up your lives to others. You have to be willing to let them in and hold you responsible for your actions. I have heard people say that they would love to be part of the church in Acts, but I don't know because if you read on in Acts 5:5-6, it says: "And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last;

and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.”

People say they would like to be part of this church, but people were dying here. People were dropping down dead. They got to see tongues and healings and prophecies, but they had to see this as well. It might make you rethink whether you want to be part of the church in Acts or not. Just to help you understand what is going on here, if you remember the church had just started. It was only several months old by the time we get to Acts 5, and the Lord wanted to send a message to His people that sin would not be tolerated in His church at the very first. And here He wanted to let them know that sin would not be allowed.

1 Peter 4:17 says that judgment starts at the household of God, and that’s what you read here. God is judging His own people. Not in an eternal way – we don’t know that Ananias was lost. Maybe he was and maybe he wasn’t, but in a temporary way, in a physical way. God struck him dead. Someone asked me the other day if God judges Christians. Yes, He does, and He judges them first. This is what you read here. It all starts with God’s people. If you remember when the priesthood first started in Israel, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, and what happened to them? They died. Why? Because judgement starts at the household of God. God judges His own people first. When Israel entered the Promised Land and Achan kept some of the spoil of Jericho for himself, what happened to him? He died. Why? Because judgement starts at the household of God. When the Ark was first being taken to Jerusalem and they were making things ready for the Temple, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. What happened? He died. Why? Because judgement starts at the household of God.

So before you say that you want to be part of the church, I would encourage you to think that through. There was a high accountability here. There was a Righteous Judge that we have to answer to. People are not dropping dead anymore, thank goodness. That only happened here. But the Judge is still with us. He didn’t go anywhere, and the church is there to remind you of that. That’s why we are here. Robert Murray McChesney said, “The man who loves you the most is the one who tells you the most truth about yourself.”

That is what the church is here to do: to tell you the truth about yourself. To tell you how you stand before a holy and righteous Judge. Franklin Delanore Roosevelt’s closest advisor during WWII was a man named Harry Hopkins who served no real purpose in his cabinet. Nobody knew what he did. He didn’t have a job – a real job anyway. So finally someone asked the President, “Why do you keep that man around?” and Roosevelt said, “Because he is honest with me.”

My friends, we all need someone to be honest with us. We all need someone to tell us the truth. That’s what the church is here for – to say, “Hey, don’t lie about that land. Don’t try to deceive people about your property. God will judge you for that.” When I first came to Grace Fellowship Church, someone paid me a wonderful compliment. They said, “I can understand you because you don’t use big words.” I really appreciate that. It meant the world to me. I was telling that to a friend who said, “Cagle, you don’t know any big words. That’s why you don’t use any.”

Do you have a friend who will tell you that? That you don't know any big words? That you aren't that special? Do you have a friend who will take you down a notch? Who will tell you just the way it is? Who will tell you the truth about your shortcomings? Who will tell you about your sins? The puritans used to say that everyone should have three circles of friends: one that includes everybody (it is a very large circle), one that includes a few people (it is a smaller one), and one that includes one or two. They called them bosom friends, or soul friends. People you could share your soul with. People you could open up with about anything. Do you have friends like that? Let me tell you, you need them. No one can follow Christ alone. John Piper said, "Sanctification is a community project," and he was exactly right. You need a community to do this. You need soul friends.

You need people who will tell you that you don't need to talk like that. That doesn't honour God. That doesn't please Him. You need people who will tell you that you don't need to respond like that. You don't need to be proud. You don't need to be angry. God will hold you accountable. You will have to answer to Him, and that is what our Church Covenant says. It says:

I will diligently strive to maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of spiritual disciplines. My relationship will be evident through my consistent participation in worship services...

We want your consistent participation in worship services for this reason: so that you will be around other Christians. So you will be accountable. We want you here on a regular basis so you can have some soul friends.

All of this leads to one more requirement for church membership that really underlies all of this: sobriety. To join a church, you need to have sobriety. You need to take it seriously. It probably goes without saying that if someone dies, it is a serious thing, and that is what this story leads to at the end of the day. Someone died – or two someones die. If you read Acts 5:7-11, it says:

Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

There are just a couple of things to point out here. For some reason Sapphira did not know that her husband died. We don't know what that is. We are not told. Three hours doesn't seem like a long time to bury someone, but in a desert climate, you had to do it quickly or the body would stink. And Ananias died under the judgment of God, so people were probably afraid of him. They thought he was cursed so they wanted to dispose of him quickly.

I want you to notice that Peter gives Sapphira a chance to repent. He didn't give Ananias this chance. He asks her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" He gave her the chance to come clean – to tell what happened. She didn't. She continued to lie. So the Holy Spirit struck her dead too, and she fell down, verse 10 says, at Peter's feet, where the money bags were – pretty ironic. She died, verse 2 says, in the same place where the gold was, which shows us that the church is serious business. Isn't it? It's a big deal to come in to the House of the Living God. Verse 11 says, "And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things."

This leads me to ask, is this how do you come to church? Do you come with great fear? Do you come with sobriety – deadly seriousness? Or do you come to hang out with your friends? Do you come to have a good time? To ask it another way, would you still come to Grace Fellowship if this happened here? If people were dying among us?

A pastor was candidating at a church when someone on the search committee asked him, "Would you die for us? If you came here to this church, would you give your life for this ministry?" I think that's a fair question for pastors and members alike. Would you die for us? Would you put your life on the line for this ministry? Sapphira did it for the wrong reasons, but will you do it for the right ones? That may sound a little bit strong, but I don't think it is.

The Scriptures tell us to pray for each other and be devoted to each other and build up each other in love. That sounds an awful lot like dying for each other, doesn't it? That sounds an awful lot like giving everything you have for each other. They tell us to admonish each other and care for each other and be kind to each other. They tell us to submit to each other and pray for each other and forgive each other. They tell us to confess our sins to each other and serve each other and to greet each other and be humble towards each other. And I could go on, but that sounds like dying for each other, doesn't it? That sounds an awful lot like giving everything you have. You are going to have to do that to make it work. You are going to have to do that if this church is to survive.

Listen friends, someone is going to upset you in this church, and when that happens, you are going to have to die for them – not kill them, but die for them. Die to your pride. Die to your sense of revenge. Die to your anger. Someone is going to gossip about you or lie to you. Someone is going to snap at you or offend you. Someone is going to say something about you that isn't right. And when that happens, you are going to have to die for them, otherwise this church will destroy itself. You are going to have to give them everything you have.

Our Church Covenant says:

As Christians, we are members of God's household called to function, participate, and minister in a particular place within the Body of Christ. A healthy body requires that each member does its part well. A healthy church requires the same: members who are sacrificially committed to each other, well equipped to do the work of service that God has prepared in advance for them to do.

You are asked to be sacrificially committed to each other. You are asked to approach the church with sobriety; with deadly seriousness. That is what is required of you if you want to be a member of the church. You are required to commit, to have integrity, to be accountable, and to be sober-minded. That is what you are signing up for if you agree to this covenant. That is what you are signing up for if you commit to this church. This is a big day for us at Grace Fellowship Church. We just finished our first sermon series as a church today – you thought it would never happen – and start the membership process.

On your way out the door, the ushers will hand you a document that is our Membership Covenant. It states who we are and what we are committing to do for you as a member and what we want you to commit to for us as a church. Read over that and if it looks like something you would like to be a part of, just fill out these forms and bring them back to me or one of the Grace Advance Applicants, and we will set up a meeting to talk with you about membership. Also, next week, after the sermon, after you have had some time to read through all of this, we will have a Q & A here in the sanctuary for anyone who would like to ask some questions about the process. So if you want to know more, we would like to make that time available for you. So just write down whatever questions you have and bring them to the meeting or email them to me, and I would love to help you any way that I can. I would encourage you to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider whether you would like to join us or not. You need to commit somewhere. You can't sit on the fence and please God. Consider whether you would like to commit here. I pray that you will. It is my prayer that all of you would become members of Grace Fellowship – just being selfish here. I would like all of you to join, but there are other good churches out there too. Either way, make no mistake, church membership is a big deal. As you can see in this passage, it is no small thing to come into the house of the Living God, but this is what God expects you to do. This is an exciting time for our church as we put into practice the Word of God and commit ourselves to His body. Let's pray now and ask the Lord's blessing as we do that.