

What We Teach

Grace Bible Church Bylaws [Section 3]

Our Life Together (Relational Commitments)

PREFACE

The following Peacemaking Commitments (Article XVI of the GBC Bylaws) are designed to help the people who attend Grace Bible Church relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships in the body of Christ, in accord with the Holy Spirit's activity (Gal 5:16-22). These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling, confidentiality, and mutual accountability. They do not cover every aspect of God's Word. The focus herein is on those relationship areas that often cause disunity and broken fellowship within the church.

These Commitments are intended to help us build a strong community of faith. By community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship God, grow in our understanding of His love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation and peace they, too, can find through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that this kind of community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries, but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1-2 warns, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it."

At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. Consequently, that is why we believe these Commitments can be of great value. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines when we encounter relational conflict. These Commitments accomplish several important purposes.

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ and bring glory to God.
- They help to prevent unwanted surprises, unmet expectations, confusion, and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear direction to follow when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, protect our children from abuse while under the leaders' supervision, and exhort to repentance those who are not living according to scriptural commands.

As you read our Relational Commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these Commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach us. We would be happy to talk with you about these principles.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join Grace Bible Church by going through our membership process. An application that defines the process of becoming a member may be obtained from our Church Office.

If you are not yet ready to become a member, you and your family are certainly welcome to attend our worship services and Bible classes, to find fellowship in a fellowship group, and seek assistance from our leaders. Please also realize that if you continue relating to us in any of these ways, you are giving your consent to these commitments (by your attendance) even if you are not formally a member of Grace Bible Church.

As followers of Christ, we will do all we can to encourage you to grow in faith and godliness and to live a disciplined life that honors our Lord Jesus Christ and enhances the witness of His church.¹

~ The Elders of Grace Bible Church

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¹ These Relational Peacemaking Commitments are adapted from *The Peacemaker Church*. Used by permission of Peacemaker® Ministries. Edition 1.1 www.PeacemakerChurch.net

ARTICLE XVI – RELATIONAL PEACEMAKING COMMITMENTS

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL ONE-ANOTHERING

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:1-3, 32).

Any attempt to seek unity and peace in the Body of Christ must first begin with an understanding of the source of divisions. The Bible clearly defines the source: All conflict begins with a desire to please ourselves and not seek after God's best for us. His best is often caring for others above ourselves (James 4:1-4). The proper attitude toward others -- that promotes peace and unity -- is also clearly defined in scripture through the "One Anothers." The "One Anothers" are twenty-five commands that tell us how we are to treat one another in the Body of Christ:

- contribute to one another's needs (Rom 12:13);
- spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24);
- love one another (John 13:34-35; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:9; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7-12; 2 John 1:5);
- be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom 12:10; 1 Pet 3:8);
- give preference to one another in honor (Rom 12:10);
- accept one another (Rom 15:7);
- admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14);
- be united with one another (Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 1:10; 1 Pet 3:8);
- serve one another through love (Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:10);
- show forbearance to one another in love (Eph 4:2);
- be kind to one another (Eph 4:32; 1 Pet 3:8);
- be tender-hearted to one another (Eph 4:32);
- forgive one another (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13);
- speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19);
- teach one another (Col 3:16);
- encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11, 14; Heb 3:13; 10:25);
- build one another up (1 Thess 5:11);
- help one another (1 Thess 5:14);
- be patient with one another (1 Thess 5:14);
- be hospitable to one another (Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9);
- be sympathetic toward one another (Rom 12:15; 1 Pet 3:8);
- restore one another (Gal. 6:1); bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2);
- be humble toward one another (Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 3:8; 5:5);
- look out for one another's interests (Phil 2:4).

Grace Bible Church is committed to living these "One Anothers" in every aspect of our lives. Some of these commands are of a comforting nature. Others are of a corrective nature. It will take wisdom and patience in all circumstances to apply these truths at the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. We believe that, with God's enabling grace and with humble submission on our part, these "One Anothers" can characterize our lives. This will result in God-centered relationships, and it will promote peace and unity in our church.

COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

Grace Bible Church is committed to building a “culture of peace” that reflects God’s peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness, and broken relationships are not acceptable for the people whom God has reconciled to Himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph 4:29-32; Col 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us His wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

A. Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words, and actions (1 Cor 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting, and slander (Eph 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about others unless we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them. (Prov 12:18; Eph 4:29; Gal 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps 141:5; Prov 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive (and restore) them as He has forgiven us (Eph 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will consider others’ interests, as well as our own (Phil 2:3-4).

B. Assisted Peacemaking

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in Grace Bible Church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt 18:16; Phil 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other church leaders for assistance.
- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from Grace Bible Church leaders or others they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt 18:17-20).
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer and make a good faith effort to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to Grace Bible Church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his or her former church, or is under discipline from that church, we will require and assist him or her to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining Grace Bible Church (Matt 5:23-24; Rom 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our *Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline* at the end of this document.

- If we have a legal dispute with or within Grace Bible Church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration.²
- Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and lead others to know His infinite love and peace.

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matthew 19:6).

God designed marriage to glorify Himself and to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:7). Therefore, He established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all of you to know that you are welcome at Grace Bible Church.

Because Grace Bible Church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and discouraging divorce. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling for all couples seeking marriage at Grace. The purpose is to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by actively participating in fellowship (especially Fellowship Groups) through which people can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb 10:24-25).

We also expect husbands to encourage one another to love, cherish, and spiritually lead their wives; and wives to respect and lovingly submit to their husbands (Eph 5:33). Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that, instead, can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness, and ongoing discipleship.

It is the Elders' biblical conviction that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is permissible in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps 103:8-12; Isa 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col 3:12-14; Gal 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal redemptive discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt 18:12-20). Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, we believe that they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is encouraged to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

² This is in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, (www.Peacemaker.net).

Separated spouses who have filed for divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with the scriptural mandates for marriage.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate.

The Grace Bible Church leadership will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and, in the case of divorce, every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does Grace Bible Church. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Proverbs 27:12a).

Children are a blessing from God, and He calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

However, since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- We do not allow anyone to work unsupervised with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended Grace Bible Church and is a formal member.³
- We require all those who work with our youth (children or teenagers) to complete a detailed application and we will provide a screening process (including background checks).

We will strive at all times to have those who work with our youth (children or teenagers) serve in teams of two or more and to be visible to other workers.

We will strive at all times to have at least one assistant in the class for mutual protection of students and teachers.

If a child is harmed in Grace Bible Church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold the offending person fully responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Romans 15:14).

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them

³ The only exemption from this "formal membership rule" is the children of established members who have demonstrated faithful ability and will work along side adult members in an assisting role.

to seek assistance from other believers and, when needed, from church leaders who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom 15:14; Gal 6:1-2; 2 Tim 4:1-2; Heb 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its people to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other and to our leaders.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

We expect all counselors to treat counselees with respect and courtesy and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Eph 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the church leadership any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

To prevent counselors from being placed in situations that might compromise their testimony or fitness for ministry, we, the members and adherents of this church, agree to the following:

- We will be willing to seek counsel with at least two counselors when it is requested. This requirement is set in place to protect both parties from unwarranted accusation and any appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22).
- In cases where confidential information is shared in a counseling context, we will not try to compel the involved counselor(s) to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge the confidential information in a way that will be used for selfish or personal gains (Prov 11:13, 25:9).

In the course of counseling, if illegal behaviors are discovered, the leaders of this church have a God-given obligation to report these behaviors to the proper authorities, as the Commonwealth of Virginia law stipulates (Rom 13:1). The counselee will be informed prior to our contacting the proper authorities.

There are occasions when our leaders do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times, we expect our leaders to give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal 6:10), and to serve non-members by referring them to another source of godly counsel.

COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Proverbs 11:13).

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and adherents are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, counselors will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as is possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others in the process of helping a counselee. In particular, when, with the help of our leadership, a counselor believes it is biblically necessary, they may choose to disclose information to others that will help the counselee, in the following circumstances:

- When a counselor is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from the leadership of Grace Bible Church, or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov 11:14).
- When it is believed that the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov 24:11-12).
- When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt 18:15-20).
- When the leadership is required by law to report behavior that is against the law (Rom 13:1).

To allay any concerns, the leadership wants to be clear that, in divulging this information, the intent is to help, never to harm. The counselee's name will be withheld, and the issues will be discussed only in generic terms, unless it is absolutely necessary to divulge the specifics.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

NOTE: As with all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all who attend Grace Bible Church (both members and adherents).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that He sent His Son to die for her (Eph 5:25). His ultimate purpose for His church is to present her as a gift to His Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Rev 19:7). For this reason, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to consist of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic, or harsh, as modern society often does. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those He loves" (Heb 12:6). "Blessed is the man You discipline, O LORD, the man You teach from Your law" (Ps 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a God-honoring family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This process, sometimes called "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship, and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions, God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, He corrects us. One way He does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back to the path of godliness. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is always to be administered in humility and love, with the goal of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God (1 Pet 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and who lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who attempt to bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so that they can play a piece properly. We applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they err so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in His Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to helping one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The leaders of Grace Bible Church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in Grace Bible Church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal, and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:12-13). This is why the Bible says to those who have fallen prey to this, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within Grace Bible Church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his or her sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding the Lord's Supper, removing from office, withdrawing of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removing from membership and church attendance (Matt 5:23-24; 2 Thess 3:6-15; Matt 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior. This step may include close friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt 18:17; 1 Tim 5:20).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then our leaders may formally remove him or her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to treat the individual as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat him or her as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to them, remind them of God's holiness and mercy, and call them to repent and put their faith in Christ (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20).

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen Grace Bible Church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is in process. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be made effective until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these *Commitments* (Matt 18:12-14; Gal 6:1; Heb 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from their sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matt 18:12-14; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and our leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Col 3:12-14).

Where known, people who have been excluded from another church because of church discipline issues will not be allowed to partake of the sacraments, become members, or participate in the regular fellowship of Grace Bible Church, until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or until such time as our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.