



Bethel Chapel Church Relational Commitments

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Introduction

The following Relational Commitments are designed to help the members of Bethel Chapel Church relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling and confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

These Commitments are intended to help protect and preserve our community of faith. By community, we mean a group of Christians 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.¹

We know that true community is not easy to achieve and sustain. 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 quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”

That certainly describes our warring passions! At times, no matter how hard we try to build and preserve a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That’s where these Commitments come in. They aim to pull together key principles from God’s Word and serve as our relational guidelines. These Commitments are designed to 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.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion, and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on 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, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby pursue the fair treatment of all members.²
- Finally, they reduce our church’s exposure to legal liability by clearly describing our relational practices and by giving all who attend our church the opportunity to be informed of and give their consent to these biblical practices.³

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 our leaders, who will be happy to talk with you about these principles.⁴

Occasionally, we will update these Commitments as the Official Board deems necessary. If any significant changes are made, the entire congregation will be made aware of the changes.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join our church. If you are not yet prepared to become a member, you and your family are welcome to attend Bethel Chapel Church and participate in its ministries while you continue to consider the wisdom and biblical faithfulness of what membership here involves. We do take membership seriously.⁵ If you, with a clear, biblically informed conscience, cannot be a member at Bethel Chapel Church, we hope in due time you will be a committed member at another Bible-believing church where you can thrive in the fullness of all that membership means.

The Elders at Bethel Chapel Church,

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COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

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

Our church desires to build 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 appropriate 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, out of love for Christ and in reliance on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we are committed to resolving our differences according to the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

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 seek to refrain from all gossip, backbiting, and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we intend to talk to them, not about them.
- We will endeavor to make charitable judgments toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).⁶
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will seek reconciliation without delay (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, rather than beating them down (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).
- As we seek to resolve differences with others, we will look out for their concerns and interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them freely and fully as He has forgiven us so that we might glorify His reconciling grace (Eph. 4:32).

Assisted Peacemaking

- When two or more of us cannot resolve a conflict privately—whether it’s personal or has church, business, or even legal implications—we will obey God’s command to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) by looking to our church for assistance and cooperating with our leaders or wise people they recommend to resolve the matter through biblical mediation or arbitration (Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).⁷
- If we have a conflict with a person who attends another church, we will make every effort to cooperate with our church leaders as they seek to work with the leaders of the other church to resolve the matter in a biblically faithful manner.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will assist him in seeking to be reconciled to the other person before joining our 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*.
- If we have a dispute with or within our church as a corporate body and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will make every effort to resolve our differences through biblical mediation or arbitration before we resort to other processes.⁸

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will be a means of spreading the glory of God and the Good News of the gospel to the world.

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage 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 have found repentance and forgiveness in coming to Christ and sought reconciliation where possible. Others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others, even after professing faith in Christ, may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and received the forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus and sought reconciliation where possible. Whatever the circumstances, we welcome everyone to Bethel Chapel Church – single, married, and divorced.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide serious premarital counseling to help couples enter into marriage advisedly, and be well-prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in our small group ministry where they can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to helping individuals and couples receive biblical counsel and support when they 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.

COMMITMENT TO RAISING OUR CHILDREN IN THE GOSPEL

"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord." (Psalm 127:3a)

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 place of safety and blessing for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ. Parents have the primary responsibility of disciplining, raising and teaching their children the Word of God. The goal for parents is to be so changed by the gospel, awed by God's greatness and saturated in God's Holy Word that these same things overflow into the lives of their children. (Deut 11:18-21; Psalm 78:4) The greatest possession a parent has to pass on to their children is a love and passion for God and His marvelous work of salvation. The

Bible also gives parents the responsibility of providing physically for their children (1 Tim 5:8) and disciplining their children without anger or abuse (Prov 13:24; Eph 6:4)

Bethel Chapel Church is committed to supporting, training and assisting parents in this high calling of raising children. The Bible teaching (in Sunday School classes, children's church, youth group, nursery etc.) are designed to reinforce what the child is already being taught at home. Lessons during these times are to be focused on the gospel, God's greatness and God's Word to help the child grow spiritually. In addition to teaching, we also desire the church to be a place where intergenerational relationships can be formed. This allows the gospel to be modeled and transmitted in the context of relationships (I Tim 5:1-2; Titus 2:2-8). And when the physical family is corrupted by sin, it allows the spiritual family of God to play an important role in communicating the gospel to the next generation. To this end, Bethel Chapel Church has many formal and informal opportunities for multi-generational activities.

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. (Prov. 27:12) We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen at Bethel Chapel Church, but we are committed to taking reasonable precautions to protect our children and youth from foreseeable harm.

If a child or youth is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending workers fully responsible for their actions.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. (Rom. 15:14)

Our goal in providing biblical counseling is that we may "present everyone mature in Christ" (Col.1:28). We believe that the Bible is God-inspired guidance, instruction, and power for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling relies on biblical teachings and principles applied with "all wisdom" through the Holy Spirit to each situation we counsel. We are committed to asking the question, "What does Scripture say regarding this matter?" and to counseling in the light of the response to this question.

We believe that Christ has equipped His body, the church, to provide wisdom, knowledge, and instruction to one another (Rom.15:14) in order for each member to live a godly and holy life, pleasing God in all ways. Christ has also equipped His church with spiritually mature leaders who are able to shepherd, lead, teach, and counsel others (Heb.5:11-14) in the church. Though the educational and experiential background of each leader who counsels at Bethel Chapel Church is unique, the essential training and practice for all leaders who counsel at Bethel Chapel Church centers around their ability to apply Scripture to the situation they are counseling. For this reason, those who counsel for Bethel Chapel Church do not present themselves as psychotherapists nor mental health professionals but as biblical counselors.

In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding leaders in the church that provide "spiritual counsel," the following clarifications should be kept in mind.

1. Leaders who provide spiritual counsel may also be trained in other areas of life that are outside of the realm of providing spiritual counsel. Thus, if a doctor provides “spiritual counsel” through the church, we understand that this is separate from his providing “medical counsel” at his clinic.
2. God calls the leaders in His church to set an example “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). If any leader should not live up to this standard in any counseling situation, the counselee should report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.
3. Confidentiality is an important factor in establishing a relationship to receive spiritual counsel. The leader providing spiritual counsel will keep counseling sessions confidential except in the following situations:
 - when 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 leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

Providing spiritual counsel requires a relationship between the leader and the counselee. Occasionally there may arise a misunderstanding between the counselor and the counselee. We will seek to handle these misunderstandings in a biblical way. This includes being willing to submit to legally binding arbitration, rather than filing a lawsuit, and also not attempting to require a “spiritual counselor” to appear in court or to provide his notes.

Our desire is to provide wise, spiritual, godly counsel to each person in our church. By sharing these guidelines, we hope the biblical counseling offered at Bethel Chapel Church will help many become “mature in Christ.”

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. (Heb. 10:24)

Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all members of Bethel Chapel Church.

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 demonstrates His love for His church in that He sent His Son to die for her (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:25). His 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 be made up 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 on 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).

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as “discipline.” The Bible does not present church discipline as negative, legalistic, or harsh. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Heb. 12:6). “Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law” (Ps. 94:12). “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline” (Rev. 3:19).

God’s discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as “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 onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called “corrective” or “restorative” discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful, or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals 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’s name (1 Pet. 2:12).

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

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Gal. 5:23). 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. This is why the Bible says, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our 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 will

seek the involvement of more mature church members, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher, church leader, or elder. 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 a member 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. 18:17). This first involves informing one or more church pastors/ elders about the situation. We intend to give the member every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the member recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If, after a reasonable period of time, the member still refuses to change, then our elders will bring the situation before the congregation, with the recommendation that the member be removed from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the member as an unbeliever.

This means that we will no longer treat the member as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the member, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him or her, remind him or her of God’s holiness and mercy, and call him or her to repent and put his or her 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 our 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 while discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop the process of discipline 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 a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our elders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the member 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 member find freedom from his or her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members⁹ (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 a member repents, and our elders 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).

People who have been disciplined by another church will not be allowed to become members at Bethel Chapel Church until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our elders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we intend to hold fast to the promise of Scripture: “He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:10-11).

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH

We believe that God wants every Christian to become a member of a local church.¹⁰ Becoming a member of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use one’s gifts, and mutual accountability that we experience in a church can dramatically change our relationship with the Lord and with the people He places in our lives. Therefore, we want potential members to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God’s command to build His church (1 Cor. 14:26), and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

We would be delighted to have you become a member of our body. By joining our church, members demonstrate in a concrete way their desire to unite with us to advance Christ’s mission in the world. Membership also allows you to enjoy ministry opportunities and privileges that are not available to people who merely attend our church, including the following:

- Members may participate and vote in congregational meetings, where we seek to discern and plan how to follow God’s vision for our church.
- If a member needs counseling or support from our elders when their time is limited, the member’s request for assistance will take precedence over requests from people who have not joined the church.
- Teaching and leadership ministries are only open to members.

Footnotes:

1. Unless indicated otherwise, the words “we” and “us” refer to both the members and leaders of Bethel Chapel Church.
2. When we use the term “leader” in these Commitments, we are referring to the pastors and deacons of our church.
3. See www.Peacemaker.net/risk_management for information on how these Commitments can help to prevent conflict and reduce exposure to legal liability in our church.
4. Embracing these Relational Commitments does not imply that you affirm each and every explanatory comment, biblical interpretation, or resource mentioned in this document, but rather that you agree to support and follow the specific action steps set forth in sections entitled “Commitment to” If your conscience prevents you from affirming a particular concept or commitment in this document, you may request a special waiver of that provision.
5. See www.hopeingod.org/document/relational-commitments-tale-of-families for an illustration of the value of Relational Commitments as applied to church membership.
6. See www.Peacemaker.net/charitable_judgments for more information.
7. See www.Peacemaker.net/slippery_slope for information on biblical mediation and arbitration.
8. Nothing in this section (Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation) requires individuals to relinquish any legal rights. It simply affirms that each of us is committed to obeying God’s teaching in passages like Matthew 18:16, Ephesians 4:1-3, Rom. 12:18, and 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 and will make every biblically appropriate effort to resolve our differences within the body of Christ before resorting to any other processes, including civil litigation.
9. For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.
10. For more on the importance of church membership, see Joshua Harris, Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Body of Christ; the third chapter of Donald Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ; and John’s Piper sermon “How Important Is Church Membership?” available online at http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2008/2989_How_Important_Is_Church_Membership/