



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

DECLARE YOUR INDEPENDENCE FROM INDEPENDENCE!!!

Tim Badal | July 6, 2014 | Philippians 1-4

I'm going to ask that you turn in your Bibles to the Book of Philippians in the New Testament. We're in between two series right now: having just finished our series on Samson, a guy who could have used a whole lot more wisdom had he been humble enough to do so; and next week we'll start a study on select Proverbs, looking at wise words to live by and how to use God's Word to communicate truth and wisdom.

One of the things that compelled me to preach this message was that while studying Samson's life, one thing that continued to pop out in the **Book of Judges** was that Samson was a solitary figure. He lived life on his own. There was no involvement of godly individuals speaking into Samson's life. One of the biggest reasons why Samson ran into trouble was because he didn't have a group of good friends around him to show him the way to live. Because of this, Samson failed to live up to his potential.

It is a bit ironic that the only time in Samson's life when a group of people gather around him for his good is at his death. After he has pushed the two pillars off of their foundations and caused the building to collapse, the last part of the narrative describes Samson's family and friends coming, taking his body and burying it. So this is an excellent picture of an Old Testament man who was empowered by God to do incredible things, but he lacked a community of people around him who would help him make godly and wise decisions rather than falling prey to Satan's attacks..

I want this time to be a time of examination of our hearts.. I want to talk on the subject of community and do so under the heading of what we've just celebrated as a country: independence. We'll look at the first few verses of the **Book of Philippians** under the heading: Declare your independence from independence. I believe this is why Samson got into the trouble that he did. If we think we can live the Christian life on our own, we are fundamentally flawed in our understanding of New Testament Christian living. In some ways, the Christian life can be lived as individuals. For example, we have to come to a place where we repent of our sins, submit ourselves to the ways of God, and receive the blessings that come from the Person and work of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. A person doesn't get saved as a community of people. Even if our church believes the right things, it doesn't mean we believe the right things. When it comes to living the Christian life, we cannot think that we can do it on our own. We have to live in community.

Today, I want to talk about taking away the idea of Christian independence and seeing Christian community as a hallmark of the Early Church, and as something that should be a hallmark of Village Bible Church. Sadly, the issue of community has lost its luster. It has fallen on deaf ears. As a people, we are too busy for the kind of community the Bible speaks about. I want to give you a definition of Biblical Community:

A group of diverse people who sacrificially love each other, united through a common joy in, and a commitment to, sharing and living and being changed daily by the life and love of Christ as one body.

We're different people who come together and who love sacrificially. Where do we learn that? We learn that from Jesus. As a Church community, we are a group of people who come from all different places, and all different

backgrounds, and different colors, and different experiences. What unites us is not a sports team, a political party, a socioeconomic status, or some certain ideal or desire that we have in our lives. Christians are a people who come together under the banner of Jesus Christ, under the authority of God's Word, unified and filled with joy.

We come together with joy in a couple of different ways: joy in the work that Christ has done in each life, and the joy of communing with others who have also experienced Christ's saving work. We're excited about our own walk with Christ, and we're excited to see how Christ is working in and through others. We have a commitment as a community to share that joy, to live that joy out, to be changed by that joy and to practice that joy as a Body on a daily basis. This ought to be the goal of every church when it comes to community.

Let me give you a text to help you understand where we're going with this definition. Where do I get this definition? How do I see this lived out in the church? There isn't a citation for this because it's my own definition. I derived it from what I believe to be a careful exposition of **Hebrews 10:19-25**:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Let's stop there for a moment. We cannot have Biblical community with one another until we have Biblical community with the God Who has saved us. Biblical community cannot happen among unsaved people. Biblical community is based on a person having a right relationship with God. The process begins because we have come into community with God through the work of Jesus Christ. We engage in community because we have been united with Christ, sharing the common joy of what He has done in and through us, and as a result we're being changed. That's what the first part of the Book of Hebrews says. Without skipping a beat, the writer of Hebrews reminds us of a truth that the American Church has forgotten. Many of us will say, "Yeah, I've got community with God. Yes, I've got a great relationship with God. I have a Friend in Jesus." But the writer of Hebrews says, "You cannot have a Friend in Jesus if you don't also have friends among your brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you are living life. You cannot have Biblical community with God without also having Biblical community with the Christian brothers and sisters around you." The Book of **1 John** tells us that we cannot say we love God and hate our brother. In order to love God in the way He's called us to means that we have to love our brothers and sisters, serve them and fellowship with them just as we serve and fellowship with God.

Now notice how the author of Hebrews moves to community with one another:

²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Community begins with God, but it ends with people. It begins with my relationship with God, but it overflows in my relationship with all of you. And I can't say that I have a great relationship with God and not have a great relationship with you. This is the difference between our relationships with one another and other earthly relationships: our neighbors, our friends and family who don't know Jesus. The relationship that we have with God should transform our relationships with one another. It should transform our dialogues. It should change the way we counsel one another. It should change the way we spend time with one another. It should create a level of excitement and a level of intimacy that this world on its own would never be able to find. It should transform the way we relate to each other as a family.

However, when we look at our relationships and our communications, this transformation is absent. If we were to play back our conversations in the foyer, if we were to play back our conversations when we gather together as a church, our conversations are not much different from those we have with our unsaved family and friends. Maybe the language is a little bit cleaner, maybe the jokes aren't as coarse, maybe there are some things of value to talk about, but at the end of the day our conversations and relationships with the Body of Christ are of no more depth

than those with our secular friends and family members. Why is that? I'm going to give you two examples of enemies of a community of believers.

Two Enemies of Biblical Community

While I don't know if a lack of Biblical community is an issue in the Church outside of America, I do know what happens within the American Church. On the **Fourth of July**, we celebrate the birth of a nation which might be great for our country but may not be great at all for the Church. In 1776, the Founding Fathers threw off the chains of tyranny. They told the king, "You can't tell us what to do! We believe all men should be free and unencumbered by anyone else." Phrases in the days of the Revolution included, "Give me liberty, or give me death," "Don't tread on me" and other incredible slogans. These slogans were not only commonplace then, but as you will hear more and more, they're commonplace today as well. We want a nation that is free, where we can do what we want, dream about opportunities and have nothing encumber our pursuit of happiness. But the things that make for a great nation don't always make for a great Church.

I would like to create a dichotomy between the message of independence for us as a nation and independence for us as a Church. If we take the concept of freedom and extrapolate it by putting it within the context of the Church, we will fail miserably at living up to what the New Testament says about community. You see, the Church stands in opposition to this idea of independence. Christians must understand that we are not only dependent on God and Christ, but also on our brothers and sisters, those with whom we fellowship. We are to do so, as the New Testament says, through the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (**Ephesians 4:3**). Yet that is the very thing we as Christians don't do regarding our community. Why is it? There are two enemies I want you to see.

Individuality

The first enemy for us as Americans is this ideal of individuality. We want to be our own individual and see that as our birthright. The dictionary defines individualism as, "the leading of one's life in one's own way without regard for others." Now let's just stop there for a moment and think about that. I'm not saying this because you're hurting other people around you, or because you are just focused in on doing what you're doing in your own way. I doubt that you think, "Everybody stay out of my way. I'll leave everybody else alone. I'm doing my own thing." I am saying this because the Church as a community will always be opposed to this kind of individualism, which is so prevalent in our society.

When advising foreign exchange students, the University of Pennsylvania gives the following advice regarding American culture. Number one on their snap-shot of what **American culture** looks like is the following statement:

Probably the most important thing to understand about Americans is their devotion to individualism. Since childhood Americans are encouraged to see themselves as individuals, responsible for their own destiny, not as a member of any collective group. Many Americans believe that the ideal person is an autonomous, self-reliant individual. They generally do not prefer being dependent on other people or having others dependent on them. Americans have a desire for personal success, both social and economic, and many do not consider social and cultural factors as insurmountable barriers to their ability to get ahead. One result of this attitude is the competitiveness of the American society. This pursuit for personal achievement is a dominant motivation in American life and this can lead to a not-so-friendly competition.

Now let me nuance this for a moment. In some ways this is exactly what makes America an exceptional country. This is why we invent things like no other country in the world. However, when we bring individualism into the Church realm and American Christians get into a place where it's all about them, the Church fails to live out its commission to love one another as Christ has called us to do. So individuality is a problem. When we gather as a church and sit in these pews, it's business as usual. "It's about me. It's about my desires. What is the Church doing for me? Are they meeting my desires and my goals?" Instead of looking at "What can the Church do for me?" the

church should be a place where we aim to do things for others. “How can I come into this place and encourage a brother or sister?” When was the last time we were preparing our hearts for worship and said, “Lord, I want You to put me in a situation this morning where I can be a blessing to somebody,” or “Lord, You’ve given me a wonderful week and I want to be an encouragement to someone who’s having an absolutely terrible week. I want to get into their lives and show them what hope they can have in Christ”? When do we spend time in our fellowship asking the question, “What can I do for someone else”?

Today in the Church, people come from the vantage point of consumers, seeking to meet their tastes and preferences instead of participating as part of the Body. As a result, this individualistic attitude derails our thinking about the Church. It goes directly against the Lord’s greatest command to love one another as we love ourselves. So the above description cannot be the attitude of a Church member here at Village Bible Church. The Church has to be opposed to that kind of individualism because the nature of the Church is to be love. Where there is love there will be union; where there’s union there will be fellowship; where there’s fellowship there will always be interdependence; and where there’s interdependence there will not be self-imposed isolation and indifference to others.

If you want to live an isolated, independent Christian life apart from the Church, you are ripping up whole sections of the New Testament and saying, “I am going to live contrary to what the Bible says.” You’ve heard the phrase, “There’s no I in team.” Well, there is no “I” in New Testament Christianity, either. It’s all team. It’s all together.

Insecurity

The second enemy to community is insecurity. This one’s quite simple. You and I have a fear of admitting that we have issues, that we have frailties, that we have flaws, that (might I add) we have sins. Now the absolute idiocy of this, as Christians, is that we believe in a doctrine called **total depravity**. We believe this doctrine to be imperative for understanding anthropology--the study of man. We believe the Bible clearly teaches that you and I were not only conceived in sin, but also our lives are touched by it. Total depravity doesn’t mean we’re as bad as we could be. We’re not all **Hitlers**; we’re not all **Joseph Stalins**; we’re not all mass murderers. What total depravity means is that every part of our being has been affected by sin. So the idiocy of it all is that we’re afraid to talk about our sin even though we believe we are all capable of these sins.

Let me give you an example; I believe that every fiber of my being has been touched by sin. There’s not one part of Tim Badal that hasn’t been impacted by the sin nature, which is waging war against the spiritual change in my life wrought by regeneration. But here’s what we do. We come to church and someone asks, “How was your week?” To which we respond, “Great! Wonderful! Everything’s going just fine. Don’t ask me about my relationship with God because I didn’t spend a lick of time in His Word. Don’t ask me about my relationship with my wife; we haven’t really been married, in the sense of being in love with one another, for years. Don’t ask me about my kids because, God help me, I wanted to sling them up with a noose. I just want to be done with them. Don’t ask me about my job because I have stolen, connived and made my fellow employee’s lives miserable. I’m the most hated guy in the office because I’m cut-throat. Don’t ask me about my mouth because I can’t tell you how many four-letter words come out of my mouth on a daily basis. Don’t ask me about my temper because I might just get angry with you and do something that you might regret. Don’t ask me about any of that; just take me at my word when I--who am a sinner, who have been touched by sin in every facet of my life--am telling you, as I lie through my teeth, ‘I’m fine. How are you?’” To which you say, “I’m good, too.”

We do this knowing that if we say something, we will break the cardinal “rule” of Christianity: not confessing sins one to another. How do I know that? Because I’ve been in groups where some sorry lug (usually a young believer) thinks he can be transparent. He gets in a group of Christians and says, “Can I just shoot straight with you? Can I be

honest with you guys?" Secretly the others think, "No, no. You shouldn't." But he's going to anyway because he doesn't know any better. He says, "Hey, you're not going to believe what I was looking at on the computer this week. You're not going to believe what I saw this week, what my entertainment choices were. You're not going to believe what came out of my mouth." And you know what happens when that is said? Nothing. The air is sucked out of the room. As one spouse looks at another, they're thinking, "Let's make sure we don't have coffee with them. Let's stay away from them. Let's make sure our kids don't hang out with theirs." However, when the Bible says, "**confess your sins one to another**" it is not a suggestion; it's a command.

Then you say, "Well, if I say something, I'll be gossiped about. If I say something, I'll be judged. If I say something, people will have wrong thoughts about me." That is why I'm preaching about community. In order for transparency to take place, you and I must become responsible for how we relate and communicate with other people. Before we judge, we must take the log out of our own eye before we can look at the speck in someone else's eye (**Matthew 7:1-5**). Only then can we build a community of love, grace and mercy, willing to speak the truth in love when necessary. This is what we have to strive for: we must stop being so individualistic. We must stop being so insecure and start understanding that unless we get involved in the Community of Christ, we will never reach the full potential of what God has for us.

So God has given us the antidote. He's given us a group of people who recognize that they themselves are sinners just like I am. They recognize that they're in need of a Savior just as I am. They rejoice in the fact that Jesus comes and does not condemn us, but shows us grace and mercy so we can rejoice together. When someone says, "I'm blowing it! I'm messing up. I cannot fix this thing on my own," they receive love, grace, mercy and truth that direct them to freedom in Christ. So why don't we do it? Because our culture says not to.

So now what do we do? We don't look to culture; we look to God's Word. Let's look at Philippians 1:1-11. Here's what Paul says about this issue of community:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Now let's stop there. Paul has just started this letter about joy but let's look at a little bit of background: Paul is under **house arrest**. He's not able to do the ministry because he's in chains and can't go anywhere. The Philippian Church hears about this and they love Paul so much that they really want to minister to this guy. They send a gift of money and one of their best people, Epaphroditus, to go and be with Paul for--what many believe to be--months. Epaphroditus takes the money and hangs out with the Apostle Paul. Now Paul is writing and he's saying, "In the worst situation, I'm not overflowing with anger or despondency or questions or anxiety; the only thing that wells up in me as I write to the Philippians is joy." The word "joy" comes out over, and over, and over again in this letter.

How is that? It is because Paul recognizes in **Philippians 1:6**, that Jesus, "*Who began the good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" God is going to see us from the point of **justification** all the way to the point of **glorification**, which he talks about in **Romans 8** in this great chain of salvation. We also use this verse as a reminder of our eternal security.

The question we don't ask is, "How does Jesus do that?" Paul proclaims that Jesus finishes the work of sanctification in our lives and brings us joy amidst severe trials and tribulations. This is the foundation for partnership with other believers. If you think you can live the Christian life on your own and reach your full potential in Christ, you're

fooling yourself. Paul tells us, “The reason why I have joy, the reason why I know God is going to be faithful, is because I see God’s hand working in your lives and, as a result, I’m being made more like Christ.”

Embracing the Right Partnerships

So what does this tell us? It tells us that we must embrace the right partnerships. We can embrace a lot of partnerships and friendships, however Paul describes a partnership here on earth that is vital to the Christian walk that we must grab ahold of. This partnership is to be with whom? It is with all the saints in Christ Jesus, wherever they may be—that’s the universal, invisible Church. Paul tells us that we can have friendships and fellowship with the universal Church. How sweet is that reality? You come into contact with somebody out of the blue and you can just feel in your heart, “The Spirit of God is in this person.” Then you hear his or her testimony and there’s an immediate connection between you. That’s the Spirit of God working.

But notice, this partnership is not just with all the saints. This is not the partnership Paul describes. He makes it abundantly clear that this partnership is with *“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi”* (Philippians 1:1). This is not community with the invisible Church, but rather within the visible church—the local church at Philippi, at Sugar Grove, or wherever that local assembly meets. It assembles under the oversight of elders and deacons as a collective group of people.

So notice what Paul says about this kind of partnership. First of all, the word “partnership” is the Greek word, **koinonia**. For many of you, that’s the only Greek word you know. *Koinonia* means fellowship. Fellowship was used in multiple ways in first century Greek. It was used to convey the fellowship that a husband and wife could have, describing an intimate fellowship. It also expressed a practical element of this fellowship. This word, *koinonia*, could also be used for a team of rowers on a ship who would row in the same rhythm, in the same direction and toward the same goal. Therefore, it is an intimate relationship we are striving toward, one with a common goal and purpose. So Paul says, “We’re in partnership.” What kind of partnership? He says, “Partnership in the gospel.” “We’re in the gospel and this is our calling.” So we, as Village Bible Church, are gathered together not because we’re Sox fans, or Cubs fans, or because we’re a political party, but because we’re under the banner of Jesus Christ Who went to the Cross and died for our sins.

These partnerships are all-inclusive

What does this relationship, this community, look like? First, it’s all-inclusive. Notice there are three times within eleven verses where Paul says, “You all.”

- In verse four, “...every prayer of mine for you all...”
- Twice in verse seven, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace...”
- In verse eight, “...how I yearn for you all...”

I want you to understand that community is not something you can come in to when you gather in the local church and only have a couple of friends; only a couple of people you really like. You say in your heart, “I don’t need to know anybody else. I’ve got my little group of friends. I don’t need any more friends.” But true, Biblical community says, “I’m going to get involved with everyone.”

You might ask, “Does that mean that we will all have the same level of friendship with all people?” No, we know that isn’t true. When Paul writes his greeting, notice that he doesn’t say, “And I write to you George, Sally and Ben.

You're great. Church at Philippi, make sure they hear that." No. Paul says, "Church, all of you, I love you. All of you, I'm praying for you. All of you, I am holding you accountable to the things that God has for His people."

So notice what that means. Community within a local church setting cannot be plagued by cliques. Community, in the Biblical sense, allows zero tolerance for racism or bigotry. Community within the New Testament Church cannot have favoritism. It must hold all people--men and women, slave or free, Jew or Greek--to the same high standard because we are all one with Christ Jesus. In the twenty-first century you would think we would have overcome favoritism, but we haven't. Some of us will look at the external image of a person and judge the future depth of our relationship with them by their looks instead of the power of God working in their lives.

These partnerships must involve action

So what do all-inclusive relationships mean for us? If we have a high regard for people within our community, it must move us to action. Community is not, "Well, I just think great thoughts of you guys." No. Notice that the Book of Philippians preaches love in action. The church of Philippi has a high regard for Paul. They think the best of Paul, and what do they do? They send him things that will relieve his suffering. They sent Epaphroditus with their money to go and spend months in jail in order to encourage Paul. That's community.

You and I will not experience community until we place ourselves into the lives of others. Epaphroditus got it. "If I'm going to know Paul, then I have to know him in that prison cell. I have to know Paul in his turmoil, in his struggle and in his pain." If you read the rest of the Book of Philippians you will see that Epaphroditus so intensely struggles to understand Paul's trials that, by the end of the book, Epaphroditus himself is near death. It's gotten bad for him. Has he quit? Has he given up? No. He loves Paul, he loves his church and he wants to serve God.

So we must recognize that to be in community with one another we have to be involved in one another's lives. Who is the prime example of that kind of involvement? Jesus. **John 1:14:** *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Jesus got up close and personal. He came and got involved in our garbage so that He might have communion with us. Aren't you glad Jesus didn't just send a little Candygram? "Ah, you guys are in sin. You're on your way to hell. Good luck." ***"But God shows his love for us in [this]..."*** How did God create community? *"He sent Jesus Christ to die for us."* He sacrificed. That same sacrifice and that same love that Jesus shows us is the same sacrifice that Jesus calls us to show one another. So community involves action. Community involves movement. The Philippians share their love for Paul and Paul writes back, saying, "In every prayer at every moment I'm thinking of you all."

These partnerships should be affectionate

Let me ask this question: is this kind of action evident in your life when you are thinking about the people of this church? Let me ask another question. Is your community filled with affection? What about love? Look at how Paul speaks to these people. In verse seven he says, *"It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart..."* He says in verse eight, *"...I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."* So let's start with the issue of the heart. "You're on my heart," Paul says. So what does community look like? It is not something where we just get together and shoot the breeze and call it a day. It is where we consider men and women in our lives so important to us that they are in our hearts. That word, **"heart"** can be translated differently. Literally, it means, "I have you, and I'm thinking of you from my bowels." A little ugly but it gets to the point. "The very essence of who I am loves you—from the very depths of who I am."

Does that kind of love define your love for the people who are sitting around you? Do you hold them in your heart? That raises the question: are you praying for them? When you prepare your heart as you gather together as a community do you think, "I want to serve them. I want to take the towel and basin and wash their feet. I want to

give whatever I have to help them in their time of need. I want to serve them as Christ has served me.” If we desire to be a church with community and to practice community Biblically, we have to have a deep and profound love and concern for each other. Sadly, because of our society, even within a great church like Village, our feelings are only skin deep and surface level. Until we plumb the depths of who we are, and reach to the depths of where others find themselves, we will never experience Biblical community.

These partnerships involve accountability

Before you start thinking that Biblical community is just loving one another and singing “Kumbaya,” you need to understand that community has a purpose. Paul gives us this purpose in verses nine through eleven. He says, “Alright, I love you and I believe in you. Because of those two things I expect some things from you.” Isn’t that true of our relationship with Christ? God loves us, He meets our needs and He doesn’t say, “Alright, you don’t have to do anything else.” No. He says, “I’ve died for you; I’ve paid the price of sin now live for Me.” Paul says, **“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** Not, “Hope that you have salvation with fear and trembling.” No. You’ve got salvation, now work that salvation out. Live in such a way that you recognize the incredible cost that saving us from our sins took and live differently.

So Paul says, “I love you, I’m here to serve you, and by serving you I’m going to call you out with some aspects of accountability.” What are some of the things for which we are accountable? Notice what he asks for in his prayer: “Philippians, I pray that your love may abound more and more.” “How are you loving one another?” he’s asking. Paul knows that their love is not abounding. It’s abounding in some ways, but not in all ways. How do I know that? Because **Philippians 4** tells us that two women were fighting, and it had gotten so bad that the church had been pulled into this conflict. So Paul says, “Hey, make sure your love is abounding.” We need to hold each other accountable with this question: how are we loving?

Men, ask one another, “How are you loving your wife?” Women, ask other women, “How are you loving your husband?” Parents are you asking each other, “How are you loving your kids?” “How are you loving the unbelievers in your life? How are you loving your enemies? Is the work of Christ causing your love to abound more and more?” That should be a part of our fellowship.

We should also be asking the question, “Is our knowledge of God increasing?” Paul does in his prayer. He prays that our knowledge would increase. So let me ask you, when was the last time you asked someone, or someone asked you, “What did you learn this week from God’s Word? What did you learn from your study?” We’re followers of Jesus Christ and God’s written this love letter to us. What have we learned from it? How have we been changed by it? In what ways has studying God’s Word caused us to become more discerning? Wiser? Notice in verses ten and eleven Paul goes on and says, *“...so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness...”* So accountability asks the question, “What are you doing with the righteousness of Christ in and through you? How are you serving? How are you giving? How are you using your time for furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ?” Those are the questions we need to ask when we’re in community with one another. We need to be willing to ask those hard questions and speak the truth in love.

So as you remember these things, ask yourself, “Do I love all the people who are part of this local assembly? Is my love moving me to action? Is the partnership that I have with my fellow brothers and sisters at Village Bible Church an affectionate one, not just skin deep, but one that plumbs the depths of who I am? Is it moving me to hold people accountable?” We have to ask the question, “Are we loving this way?” And I would say as much as I love this church my answer would have to be, “No, this is not how we’re loving.” We’ve got a lot of room to grow and I believe we’re capable of it, but how do I know that we don’t love in this way? Because if we have love and community with one another, then we would never have to talk about how we’re in a financial deficit because we would understand that

community is not just showing up to church. You, your time, your talents, your treasures are all part of this community so that the furthering of the gospel can take place. You cannot hold it back for yourself in your individualistic, insecure life. We must give generously because God says that it's better to give than to receive (**Acts 20:35**).

If community were lived out at Village Bible Church, we wouldn't have a need for children's Sunday School teachers. Why don't we have people sign up? Because we're busy. Because we want to keep our schedules clear for our own time. "Who cares about the kids of the community, it's about me!" If community were present here the parking lot would be filled at 8:00AM because we would be excited to get together and fellowship with one another. We'd be so excited to be here. Now, does that mean we're void of all fellowship? No, we are a wonderful church and I am blessed to be part of it. But we can do better, can't we? Isn't there a lot of American culture that has seeped into our mindset more than it should? And isn't it on this weekend of U.S. independence that we throw off the chains of that kind of isolation?

Points to Ponder

Stop masking the real you with make-up

Well, how do we do this? There are three things I want us to be thinking about as we approach the communion table. First of all, if we're going to get this kind of community, we've got to stop masking our real selves with make-up. Stop faking. Understand that we are all sinners. Let's start talking about the struggles we have: the fears, the anxieties, the difficulties we have in raising our kids, the difficulties we have in our marriages, the difficulties we have with temptation. Let's start being real and transparent with one another so that we can serve and love one another. So we can give the truth of God's Word to one another. Stop putting on a mask and show the real you, the one Jesus sees. We all need to do this.

One of the benchmarks of my preaching, which is not always popular among preachers, is that I am very transparent in the pulpit. I do that so you guys can say, "Well man, if my pastor can do it then I can do it. If he can do it in front of 650-700 people on a Sunday, then why can't I do it with my small group?" I hope you know that.

The "me" mentality must die

Secondly, we must recognize the "me" mentality must die. Our churches are filled with people who are looking for a church that meets their needs. What does that look like? We look at church and we ask the question, "Is it catering to my wants, my desires, my needs? Does it have the programs I want? Does it play my style of music? Does it preach the kind of messages I like? Does it have my kind of people? Does it have what I am looking for?" Church, let me tell you something very clear: worship time is not about you or me, it's about God and His glory. So what do you look for in a church? Is the Triune Name of God being exalted? Is the Word of God being exegeted, meaning is it being studied and proclaimed? Is the equipping of Christians taking place? Is there evangelization of the lost? We make looking for a church all about us and not about God. We must ask ourselves the question, "Am I here for me, or am I here to serve and honor God by serving and honoring others?"

Membership matters

One final thing is the issue of membership. I will say as a pastor that membership matters. So you say, "Tim, what do you mean? Okay, I get community, but now you bring up the issue of membership? Isn't that kind of a man-made thing?" Membership was in the church in the Book of Acts, and it's still around today. We know in the Book of Acts that they were able to **add to their number**; so there was a number, there was a select group of people added to that church each and every time the gospel was presented. This group of people had come to a certain place and a certain set of ideals that they were all in agreement with. Our church does the same thing.

My question to you is as a follower of Jesus Christ, as one who attends this church on a regular basis—not for the person who's brand new here—have you ever thought of the important role membership plays in this issue of community? Here's what I mean: Membership here is not like becoming a platinum card member. You don't get any perks. That may ruin the deal for you. We don't pay you anything. It's not like you get the best pew to sit on, or the coffee we give members is any better than what we give anyone else. It's none of that. Membership at Village Bible Church is a common agreement to pursue this kind of unity within this body. So membership here says, "I'm going to pursue Christ, not in isolation but in community. I'm going to do so when it's easy, when it's fun, in times of rejoicing and I'm also going to do it when it's difficult. I'm going to allow people in my life to call out sin when they see it and I'm going to welcome that. I'm going to welcome the discipline of the church." If the church collectively says to me, "Tim you're sinning," I'm welcoming that because it is not about me, it's about the glory of God in my life. The church glorifies God through its discipline. So I'm okay with that.

If you're not a member of this church, I implore you to go to God and ask, "Why not? What is holding me back?" I would implore you not to do it for any perks—there really aren't any—but do it because you're joining in community as a Christian. If you're not a member of Village Bible Church, you still can be a Christian, but you're a Christian who's living outside of real local church community which the New Testament talks about over and over again. I would ask you to examine yourself this week. If you've attended this church for any amount of time ask yourself, "Why am I unwilling, for any reason, to pursue membership?" It is through membership that we commit to this common unity in Christ.

As we close, we come to the Lord's Supper which is a reminder of our community. Many of us will say, "Well yes. the Lord's Supper is about community with my relationship with God." But it's more than that.

When I examine myself, as Paul tells me to do, I always examine my relationship with God. What sins have I committed? "Lord, I looked at something I should not have." Or, "Lord, I said something I should not have. Please forgive me. I don't want to take Your Supper in an unworthy manner." But what we don't think about is that the Lord's Supper is celebrated in community. Have you ever noticed that the Lord's Supper isn't served in your kitchen by yourself? You sit there alone, having the Lord's Supper. No, the Lord's Supper happens when God's people gather in community. It is important to remember that communion is a compound word of "common unity." It's not just common unity with God; it's also common unity with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

So I want to use this time of examination to ask the question, "Am I in communion with those around me or am I bent on declaring my own independence? Am I living in isolation? Am I living in insecurity? Are there people in my life with whom I am unwilling to commune?" Ask and seek forgiveness. I pray that you would be quick to go and reconcile with that person whom you're always skirting away from, that person you don't want to talk to because you don't like them, or the person who talks about things that aren't all that fulfilling for you. Take this time and ask the question this morning, "Am I in community with others?" And if you're not, start confessing that sin and be quick to go make it right, remembering what Christ has done for you.