

(The Aggressive Holy Spirit) What Do You Do With Immorality?

by Jim Elliff

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining the integrity and purity of the church through church discipline, and warns against the dangers of tolerance and wrong views of grace.

Duration: 1:03:30

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:1

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Moral Integrity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of maintaining the integrity of the church. He identifies five areas of sin that can threaten the integrity of the church: personal sin, interpersonal conflict, public sin, insufferable wickedness, and immorality. The speaker focuses on the last area, immorality, which is the topic of the passage in 1 Corinthians 5. He emphasizes the need for the church to address immorality quickly and decisively. The sermon concludes with a touching story of a woman who publicly declares her faith through baptism, leaving behind her old companions and embracing her new life in Christ.

Transcript

Now, confession is good for us, right? And I have to confess that I'm the freight train that Doug Moo talked about the other day. So I want to get that off my chest. They took me out of that room and put me in another place, a padded room with reinforced rafters, for last night.

But at any rate, well, I want to take you today to the book of 1 Corinthians in Chapter 5, please. Let's all turn to that passage. 1 Corinthians in Chapter 5. Some years ago, I read a book, an Oxford Press book by Greg Wills.

It was his dissertation called Democratic Religion in the South. It's a very valuable book, actually. And in that book, I read the story of a baptism that took place in Eatonton, Georgia in 1837.

And in this baptism, there were several people being baptized, but one girl in particular is noted by one writer who sort of journaled the experience. I'm going to read that paragraph in just a moment. But this girl was named Caroline or Carrie for short.

She had been a very worldly girl, and she said when she was converted to Jesus Christ during that period of time that she desired to even be more devoted to her Savior than she had ever been to the world. She was soundly converted. And I want to read for you the paragraph written in a rather eloquent way, I think, that describes what happened at that baptism.

So listen carefully to this interesting description. Of course, everybody was there. The banks of that little stream were lined with crowds of interested spectators.

Julia of Monticello, her bosom friend and companion in her worldly course, seemed loathe to leave her even for a moment and clung to her till she reached the water's edge. A hymn was sung. Minister C.D. Mallory made a few remarks and offered prayer when Minister John Dawson took Caroline by the hand and led her down the shelving bank into the limpid stream.

They had attained about half the desired depth when she requested him to stop a moment. And turning to those on the bank, waving her hand, she said, Farewell, young friends. Farewell, Julia.

The effect was electrical. The whole audience convulsed and tears ran from eyes unused to weeping. Upon coming out of the water, Julia rushed forward to meet her friend, embracing her and crying out in agonizing tones, Oh, Carrie, you must not leave me.

Mr. Dawson, pray for me. Mr. Mallory, pray for me. Now that's a touching story to me.

I always am a little bit emotive when I read that story. Here is a church and an individual, at least, who understood something of the impact of a public testimony through baptism saying that there is now a very big difference in my life. My old companions have been left behind.

My new companions are those who are the believers in Jesus Christ. My closest friends will be those. And for the rest of her life, probably, during that period of time, when people didn't move as often, perhaps for the rest of her life, she would be living in that community with an entirely new circle, a sphere of close relations to those people who were believers.

Now in the passage that we're going to look at in 1 Corinthians 5, obviously this demarcation between the world and the church, that line had been blurred, and the world has now not just come under the door, but as in this case the door has been flung wide open to the world in the Corinthian church, and they have a huge problem on their hands, but amazingly they are not really aware of the problem on the scale that they should be. And I want to read the statement of the Apostle Paul to these people about this issue that he heard about by rumor, and I want to read the entire chapter, actually, of 1 Corinthians 5. So you follow along, please, as I read. We're going to be making some observations in a moment about how to maintain the integrity of the church.

And as I read through this, I want you to note, by the way, the strength of the terms or the action words that the Apostle Paul is calling the church to carry out. So look at this. Verse 1, It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, an immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

And you have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who has done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus, I have decided to

deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ, our Passover, has also been sacrificed.

Therefore, let us celebrate the feast not with the old leaven nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world or with the covetous and swindlers or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

But actually I wrote you not to associate with any so-called brother, if he is an immoral person or covetous or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or a swindler, not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church, but those who are outside God judges? Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. Now obviously this is a key seminal passage really about the issue of church discipline.

I think you're aware, I hope you're aware, that there's more than one way to deal with people who are needing to be disciplined in a church. There are varieties of situations demanding varieties of activities. Not everything is Matthew chapter 18.

This is a mistake we often make. In the little book that I gave you, and if you haven't gotten a copy I hope you will get a copy, for every pastor or missionary or vocational leader here in this room, Our Church on Solid Ground, in the back of that book there is a statement of discipline. And in that statement we look at five situations that demand attention in the area of discipline.

First of all, minor faults, which in themselves need to be overlooked, but may come to a point through persistence of the individual to be a disciplinable matter. And then there's the category of unverifiable sins. One person sees another person do some illicit behavior, but you cannot find any actual proof to bring to the table about that issue.

How do you deal with that kind of situation? Then there's the situation of personal offense, which is where Matthew 18 comes in. This is a problem between two people, and how do you handle that kind of situation? The fourth area is in what we call public sin. And then the final area, which is the one covered by this passage in 1 Corinthians 5, we've called insufferable wickedness.

And the writer, the Apostle Paul here, obviously deals with this sin in a much quicker, decisive way, or at least he persuades the Church, attempts to persuade the Church to act quickly in the area of insufferable wickedness. Now what I'd like for us to do in these next few minutes is to walk through this passage verse by verse and simply make some observations, which help us understand how we can maintain the integrity of our churches. I think this is absolutely critical information for us.

And if we are not going to be the men, those of us who are pastors and leaders here, if we're not going to be the people who will practice what the head of the Church, in this case through the Apostle Paul, what the head of the Church has commanded us to do, then who will? And we must stand for the purity of the Church, I'd say. We must do this. And of all days, this is a day in which we need to recover this great doctrine.

So I hope it will stimulate you. I'm praying really that in some way, by looking at this passage, we will push back the kingdom of darkness in a way in our churches and something vital will happen with you as you lead your church. So let's look at this passage carefully for a few minutes then and see what we might be able to discover about the integrity of the local church.

First of all, let's read then the first couple of verses again. It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, an immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead so that the one who has done this deed would be removed from your midst.

And the simple observation I want to make here, which is kind of an overarching observation as we introduce the passage, is this. When an individual comes into the church, the local church, and becomes a member of a local church, he or she is joining a society with rules. There are boundaries in the church.

And the boundary that is mentioned here is the boundary of no sexual immorality. It is not permissible for a person to join a church, and according to the head of the church and the greatest apostle of the church, it is not permissible for them to join the church and to also practice sexual immorality. And this, of course, is not the only sin mentioned here.

If you'll go on down in verse 11, you will see that he does bring in some other boundaries in the church. He says, but actually I wrote you, verse 11, not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person. That's the case being covered here of a sort even the Gentiles didn't practice, but immorality.

Or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler, not even to eat with such a man. So there is to be no sexual immorality, no covetousness. There is to be no swindling, or drunkenness, or reviling, or idolatry.

And these are just some of the boundaries of the church. Now you can see in the first two verses that the Apostle Paul is actually shocked by what's happening. It's like he's dropping his jaw down, and his mouth is agape, and he's saying, I can't believe this.

And it's not just immorality. It's a type of an immorality that the Gentiles consider abhorrent. Even the world considers this abhorrent.

And what you're doing is nothing. Instead of mourning, as you ought to be doing, and removing the person from your mess, you are tolerant of this individual, and arrogant that you have such tolerance. Now, of course, we see this as a current problem, don't we? We know that the overarching virtue in most people's minds these days, at least the one most people think that Christians ought to have, if anybody should have it, is this idea of tolerance.

We should tolerate every possible behavior, especially in the church. Now, I see this in church after church. I have been in many, many churches, just as you, I'm sure, have.

And I'm a bit amazed myself sometimes at what I see. One of our prominent churches in our area, perhaps one of the two largest churches, just a few years back some prominent men came to discuss the fact that a man who was a homosexual was teaching in one of the classes, but the pastor of that church was unwilling to deal with it. It was a secret church, and he wanted to give the impression that we will receive anybody in this church, and he would not deal with the situation.

Now, this happens over and over again, and there's a kind of a boasting that takes place, even among otherwise evangelical churches, in saying that we can tolerate any kind of activity and behavior that goes on, because, after all, we're the loving church of God, and for the sake of evangelism, particularly, we want to be able to say our doors are open to every kind of person. Now, so when we talk about the tolerance as a virtue being the principal thing that people expect of us, now, in Christianity, we're really not talking about a brand-new problem at all, are we? We're talking about the old Corinthian problem. It's been around a long, long time.

Now, one of the reasons that we have a difficulty sometimes in putting our foot down and dealing with somebody who is illicit in their behavior is because of some wrong views, I think, of grace. Of course, on the one hand, say that God will receive any man if he comes repentantly to Him, and He will take any man because of His grace and accepts any man, no matter what his background might be, if he will put his trust in Christ. That's, of course, true.

He may come just as He is, as the song goes, just as I am. He certainly might come that way. But He comes, of course.

What we fail to remember is He comes because of His sin, and though He is a sinner and in His sin, but He comes repentantly to the Lord Jesus Christ when He becomes a believer. So there is no intentionality on the part of the individual when he enters into a relationship with Christ of continuing his sin. But some people, of course, make wrong transference about that idea of grace, and they believe it mitigates against the idea of actually being decisive about people's behavior.

And it is critical for us, I think, to explain the difference between those two things. Now, are you puffed up about that? Is your church one of those churches that does not take action on behavior that you find in your church? I remember one pastor that I talked to, an associate pastor of a church who had a lot to do with the counseling in the church, and he said concerning this large church, he said, Jim, if we practiced the church discipline that you would say the Bible says we must do, we would destroy our church. I know of several immoral people in our church, and it would literally decimate our church if we had to do this.

Well, there you have it. See, there's another reason people do not practice church discipline. They are actually afraid that it will be destructive to the church.

One of the things that churches throughout our earlier history in the States and, of course, in Europe where many of our churches' denominations began, etc., one of the things that they practiced was the idea that if a person withheld his attendance from a church, it was a disciplinable matter. I actually agree with that. I think that is true, and I think every pastor ought to consider that idea who's here, that failure to contribute your gifts and life to the body of the church, of course, is indicative, number one, of a person who's really not a believer.

He loves the environment of the world rather than the environment of God. He's uncomfortable among the people of God, and he doesn't love the brethren. So these are, of course, indications that he's really a nonbeliever if this is a persistent problem.

So we practice that as people have, and I suppose some of you practice the same way. One church that I read about had a policy on it, and I'm going to read this policy. It's a short paragraph, not because it's my favorite way of dealing with people who do not contribute their life to the body, but I have just a further comment afterward.

Just listen, however, to what was said by this one church concerning church membership and activity and failure to do that. Any member, they said in their bylaws, any member who does not have registered attendance, identified financial support, definite service contribution, and or expressed interest and loyalty within a six-month period shall be notified by the board of directors in writing within 30 days prior to any congregational meeting that he or she has been placed on an inactive member list and is not eligible to vote in any meeting of the church. Again, I'm not saying this is a good policy.

Perhaps it's not. I think there's some deficiencies in it. But would you like to know what church this is that has this policy? This is in the bylaws of the Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles, the famous gay and lesbian and bisexual, transsexual church, if I can use that word.

Now, what I'm saying to you is this. These people are stricter than you are, and it's a great shame, I think, for us to not act in this way decisively. I'm well aware, I'm well aware that in the final analysis, it is the church as a whole that must discipline, and sometimes there's an education process to bring the church where it needs to be.

But my brothers, you who are pastors and leaders in your churches, if you are not leading your church aggressively toward this, then you are certainly, most certainly disobedient to God. This is the teaching of God's Word for every church. It must be.

You're not just some amorphous group, you see, with no boundaries at all. God has given you boundaries, and you must uphold those boundaries, not in a legalistic spirit, obviously, but in a loving way you must deal with people who are disobedient. By the way, in that list of things that I mentioned, there is one word that we have in verse 11, one word particularly that we have a problem dealing with, and that's the word covetous.

He says we are not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person or a covetous. Now, there's a difficult one for us because this is a pet sin of our age, isn't it? And how many covetous or greedy people are there among us? Now, one of the most famous non-theologians said this. This is Dwight L. Moody.

But he said this, trying to be descriptive about the power of covetousness in people's lives. He said covetousness enticed Lot into Sodom. It caused the destruction of Achan and all his house.

It was the iniquity of Balaam. It was the sin of Samuel's sons. It left Gehazi a leper.

It sent the rich young ruler away sorrowful. It led Judas to sell his master and lord. It brought about the death of Ananias and Sapphira.

It was the blot in the character of Felix. What victims it has had in all the ages. It's a helpful reminder, isn't it, that covetousness is not just some sort of sin we, again, just tolerate.

And none of us will be experts at detecting this all the time. But I want to say we have to grapple with this tension here. We have to grapple with this issue that we have among us sometimes people who are covetous.

When we know, when we know, with plenty of biblical evidence, what God does when he brings a person into a relationship with Christ is he decentralizes the self. And the person really, the old greed, the old focus on self has actually been dramatically changed. Not perfectly.

We're definitely not perfect. But there's a huge change. By the way, Moody went on to tell a story.

He said there was a man who was very wealthy in New York State who had been converted. He had been known as a miser. He was a very selfish man.

But he had been converted to Christ. And one day a family came, a man representing his family came, who had been burned out of his house and had no provisions whatsoever. And he asked for some help.

And the man decided that he would take him to his smokehouse and he would give him a ham out of his smokehouse. And so as he was walking over to the smokehouse, he said the devil spoke in his ear and said, give him the smallest one. And the man, in order to attack his, the potential of selfishness in his life now that he'd become a believer, gave him the biggest ham in his smokehouse.

And after he'd done that, the tempter said, you are a fool. And the man said, if you don't shut up, I'm going to give him every ham in the smokehouse. There is something, isn't there, that happens to us when we become believers in Jesus Christ.

God really does change us. And we are constituted in a different way. This is a sin, apparently, that must in some ways be recognizable because it is mentioned in various places in the scripture as one of those issues that we're to take note of and to actually discipline.

Now, let's look at a second observation in verses 3 through 5. For I on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. And I simply want to say then as an observation concerning these verses that the church is a society that judges its members.

It does not only have boundaries, but it's a society that must judge its members. This passage where he actually uses the word, I have already judged him, should forever dispel the idea that Christians are never to judge. Of course, we know the difference between the Matthew passage and the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, Judge not lest you be judged, and the idea that a spiritual man judges all things and that, in fact, we even may at times have to set up many courts in our church to judge situations.

There is a judgment with love that seeks the best for the individual, but acts for the integrity of the church and the final analysis and the purity of the gospel and our behavior. So the church judges its members. Now, this is a very interesting and colorful section of the text that we're looking at.

It's as if, as Hendrickson says, it's as if the Apostle Paul were there in the meeting with gavel in hand. I don't know how you make decisions in your church. We probably have a variety of ways that we make decisions.

But at any rate, Paul is inserting himself into, as an apostle, as one who does not have, has basically the power of persuasion over the church. He cannot act for the church, for the local church, but he has the power of persuasion. And the way he's persuading the people is this.

He's saying, I'm right there. Just think of me as right there with you. Think of me as right there in the meeting with you.

In spirit, though not in body, I'm right there with you. But then he enforces it even more because there's another guest in the meeting, and the other guest is Jesus Christ. And he says it this way, I'm coming in the name of Jesus Christ.

My presence with you in spirit is in the name, that is, as a representative of Jesus Christ himself. And then he mentions, secondly, this. Look at it.

He says in the name, verse 4, in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus. So he's emphasizing here that there is more than Paul there in spirit. This is a matter which greatly concerns Jesus Christ, greatly concerns Christ.

And he is there, of course, with them in this decision that is being made as they discipline the church. What a significant thing that is, isn't it? Now, when he says here, verse 5, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Here's an interesting passage, of course, because now some people take that idea, deliver such a one to Satan, to be something rather spooky, that there's something almost like sorcery that takes place when you do that.

But I take a different view myself, and I suppose many of you would agree with me, that really all he's saying here is this. He's simply talking about excommunicating the individual and leaving him there in the world where Satan has his control, and leaving him there in the world rather than his profession that he's a Christian, removing him from any of the meetings of the believers and sending him out into the world for the destruction of the flesh. He is expecting that the sin of this man will actually bring great corruption to the man, so that, he says, his day will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now, I'm of the opinion that when he says his soul will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, I do not believe he's considering this man to be a true believer, but rather a non-believer. He's not saying we're going to send this man as a true believer out into the world so that God will kind of take care of the part of his nature that is prone to sin, and he will be saved, at least his spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, though his body experiences a great deal of corruption. I don't think he's saying that, because in just a few chapters later, well, the next chapter, in fact, in chapter 6, he makes it very clear, doesn't he? Maybe you could glance over there a moment and see what it says.

He makes it very clear in verses 9 through 11 that those who are immoral are not part of the kingdom of God at all. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Apparently there were people who were deceived in believing that they could become a professed Christian in Jesus Christ and then live an immoral life and still go to heaven, still be part of the kingdom of God.

That's not true, of course, is it? Do not be deceived. He wouldn't use those words otherwise. Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor effeminate nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the covetous nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Such were some of you, but you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in or by the Spirit of our God.

So I don't believe this man would be considered by the Apostle Paul when almost in the same breath he says, you see, that immoral people will not inherit the kingdom of God. I think that the Apostle Paul sees

this man as a non-believer. Indeed, when this level of discipline takes place, that is almost certainly what we're saying.

We're turning a person out into the world under, without our influences now, we're sending him out there where he lives his life basically in his mind. And we're going to send him out there under Satan for the destruction of his flesh in hopes that, I think that's the intent here, in hopes that he will be saved. Sort of like the prodigal son, that he would, by experiencing such the awfulness that sin brings, there would be at least, I think, the hope that having had some of the gospel, having heard some of the truth of God, he might come to Jesus Christ in fact, be saved and the spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

So I don't believe that's the way we ought to view this passage, at least as I see it. Now, you remember that this phrase, to be delivered over to Satan, is used in another place in the scripture. And I think it would be good for us just to take a moment to look at that as well.

So why don't we go to 1 Timothy chapter 1 for a moment and just glance at these ideas and see the Apostle Paul using the same term with another type of sin. 1 Timothy in chapter 1 and verse 20. Actually, we should get the context by going back to verse 18, if you don't mind.

Chapter 1 of 1 Timothy. This command I entrust you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

So, of course, blasphemy means to speak against God in some way. And Hymenaeus and Alexander were, similar to the 1 Corinthians 5 men, were then handed over to Satan. What is this all about? Let's go to 2 Timothy chapter 4, and I think we can find out a bit more.

2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 14, where we see the name Hymenaeus again. And he says this in verse 16, With either another man, by the way, Alexander, it's difficult for me. I'm not sure who this man Philetus is, whether it's another name for the man Alexander.

It's one possibility, I guess, or another man entirely. But Hymenaeus is there again. Look at this.

But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. We're prone immediately to say, are these the first hyper-preterists, as we look at this passage.

That's not actually provable. I don't think you can demonstrate that fully from this passage. We know too little, really, about what they were saying.

We're not even sure about what they meant by the resurrection having already taken place. Did they mean that Christ's resurrection had taken place, and that was the only resurrection there would be? That's one possibility that some people bring forward. I'm sorry, 2 Timothy.

Did I give it to you, 2 Timothy? Chapter 2. There you go. See, I'm not only a freight train. I can't get the Scripture right.

I'm sorry, not chapter 4. Thank you so much. Chapter 2, then, verse 16. Now, do you see it? Do I need to read it again, or are you okay? All right, you're okay.

All right, verse 18 says this. Let me just read that. Verse 17, Their talk will spread like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philoetus, men who have gone astray from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. So, again, we don't know whether this is a form of hyper-preterism. Some would say, then, Christ's resurrection is the only, what they meant was Christ's resurrection is the only resurrection.

There's not to be any other resurrection, and that's taken place. Some would say, perhaps they mean this, that there is a spiritual resurrection of the believer. He's raised, and we know that to be true, don't we? But that's all there is.

There won't be any bodily resurrection in the future. Some others might say that there's some kind of bodily, that they were meaning that there's some kind of bodily resurrection that takes place in the heavenly realm, not in the way that we imagine it at a future date out there. We're not sure, really, what was meant by that, so we don't want to make this a statement about hyper-preterism, necessarily, although it's very tempting, isn't it? But we know that the problem here was that they had a doctrinal aberration on a very cardinal issue about the resurrection, the bodily resurrection of believers.

And for that reason, they were dangerous people in the church, and they were actually upsetting the faith of some of the people. It was affecting the people in the church in a very serious way, and it was gangrenous, if that's the word. It was like gangrene creeping up into the body, turning parts of the body green, and really affecting deeply the thinking of the people.

So these are the people, then, that Paul felt necessary to, again, use that same phrase, to turn over to Satan or to hand over to Satan. Basically, he felt like that doctrinal aberrations of this level were indicative of persons who were actually nonbelievers, and they needed to be turned over to Satan, from which that doctrine came. It was the doctrine of demons.

It was not a doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we know and believe. So the church is a society, then, that judges its members, and we should never forget that. People who enter into our churches should know this from the outset.

In fact, I believe it's very helpful in our litigious age for them actually to sign on the dotted line, in a way, knowing that they really will be faced with this if there's aberrant behavior or doctrine that is indicative of an undergenerate lifestyle. So this is something you want to make absolutely clear with people as they come into the fellowship of your church. Now, a third observation, verse 6. Your boasting is not good.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So we see, thirdly, that the church really has good reason to expect members to conform to these rules. The church has good reason to do it, and the reason is this, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. We have to act because there is a permeating effect to evil.

Now, he uses this beautiful picture of the Passover, and you're well aware that in the period of time when the Passover was taken in the Old Testament, of course, God required that all of the leaven be taken out of the house, and the leaven, this yeast, was a symbol of evil. But the symbol here is shown to us with a new dimension here, and that is that it has a permeating effect in the rest of the body. A little leaven, actually a little bit of leaven.

It doesn't take much, does it, to put in a lump of dough to eventually permeate the whole. A little bit of leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. Now I bet if I open this session up here to testimony, some of you could actually give pretty clear testimonies about what leaven has done in your own congregations.

Would that be true? Some of you have seen the effects of sin in the rest of the body. So when you have a Sunday school teacher who's a drinker on the sly, or you have a deacon who is actually a swindler in his business, what happens is that eventually other people are affected. It lowers the temperature of the body, for one thing, but it also begins to just color a lot of things.

There's a permeation that takes place because of the sin. Now he says that we are the unleavened. Look at verse 7. Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are, in fact, unleavened.

For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. So here in the picture that he's giving us, he's saying that we are like the unleavened bread, and in fact that's true. The Lord has dealt with us as believers in Jesus Christ in such a way that he's broken the back of sin in our lives.

We are the people of God who are no longer under the dominion and the slavery of sin as we used to be. But now he's saying you need to live like you are. That's all he's saying here.

You need to purge out or take away this unleavened out of you because, in fact, you are unleavened. That's who you are by identity. You are the unleavened of God.

Christ the Passover has been slain. Now if this is not an allusion to the Lord's Supper, it is at least a reminder, isn't it, because the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper celebration. Celebrate the feast, he says, not with the old leaven or the leaven of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Now think about this just a minute. It reminds us, of course, and it would be very natural for us to be reminded, I think, of the Lord's Supper. Think about the import of this idea that when you take the Lord's Supper together and you gather together.

In the early church, I think it's defensible to say that the early church took the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis when they came together. You may disagree. Maybe there's a way to get around that, but it seems to me that the practice at least, not the command but the precedent of the early church, was to take the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis.

At least we see that in one clear passage. Now if it is true that the early church, when they gathered together, took the Lord's Supper as a regular habit, the Lord's Supper is not only a symbol, in part, of our communion with Christ and with each other. It is that, isn't it? It's a symbol of our, among other things, it's a symbol of our communion with Christ and with each other.

If it is a symbol, we must not say that it is only a symbol. It is not only a symbol of our fellowship or our communion with each other. It is an act of our fellowship with each other.

And that's significant. So the early church always took the Lord's Supper when they came together, you see. Then, of course, what we're saying here is that when you celebrate the feast or when you come together to take the Lord's Supper together, this is a true act of fellowship that needs to be guarded.

And the old leaven needs to be taken away. It needs to be purged out from among you. So the church has very good reason to act on this sin that it finds in the professing church because it has an effect on other people.

You know, some of you who are ladies and like to cook, suppose you bought a chicken one day. You went to the store and got a chicken and you intended to fry up that chicken for your husband. Since your husband is a preacher, he only eats fried chicken.

At least down south, that's what we do. And you intended to do that, but you had a busy day and you weren't able to get to it, so the chicken was just left out on the counter. You didn't even have time to put it in the refrigerator.

The next day you were busy also and you did not think to put the chicken in the refrigerator. It just sat there in that plastic sack on the counter. The third day went by.

The fourth day, by now, the house was just reeking with this rotten smell that was coming from that sack. And then one day you get up in the morning and for the first day after four or five days you don't have as much to do and you walk in the kitchen and say, Well, I better take care of things in the kitchen. And, of course, the smell is terrible.

And you look in that sack and I don't know where all those little white things come from that crawl around on carcasses, but you've got those maggots all over that carcass that are just covering that carcass, all around that carcass. And you say, My, I've left the chicken on the counter. And what am I going to do about it? I paid good money for that chicken.

You're on a pastor's salary and you're not going to give away a good chicken, throw out a good chicken. And so you say, Well, here's what I'll do. I'll go to the store and I'll buy a fresh new chicken and I'll bring it back and I'll put it in the same sack with that rotten chicken and it's going to take care of it.

Right? Well, you ladies tell me, will that work? It won't work, will it? Because it's always true, isn't it? It's always true that the rotten affects the fresh. It's always true. It works that way, always.

Habakkuk reminds us of this. If you want to look it up later, or rather Haggai 2, 10 through 14, makes this point as well. It's always the rotten that affects the fresh.

It doesn't happen the other way. That little bit of leaven leavens the whole thing. I don't know how many times through the years I've heard this kind of thing come out.

I remember just a couple of years ago somebody saying to me about their daughter who had become, having been a church member all of her life and active in the church that they belonged to, had now become just sort of incorrigible and difficult and a problem. And I asked her, Well, how did it begin to happen? She said, Well, it happened in the youth group. Now this is, that's not unusual at all, is it, for that sort of thing to happen.

You're not just battling the world in a way out there, as we see it outside of the professing church, but we have so neglected our responsibilities in the area of church discipline that we battled even among the professing church, sometimes in huge ways. We find that church groups can influence negatively people's lives. We're almost afraid sometimes to put a new Christian in the church.

You ever had that experience? You ever had that? I travel a lot and work in a variety of churches and I've seen that sort of thing happen where somebody's come to Jesus Christ and I almost hate to put them in the church because I feel like it's going to do something negative to them to be in that church because a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. And it's a very, very important consideration, isn't it? Let's look at a fourth observation here, verse 9. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world or with the covetous and swindlers or with idolaters for then you would have to go out of the world.

But actually I wrote you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person or covetous or an idolater or a violer or a drunkard or a swindler, not even to eat with such a one. So ultimately when a church judges its members it withdraws its most precious gift, fellowship. Now if that is not a precious gift to you then you probably are of the category of people who have not dealt with church discipline.

And this is so often the case. These words almost seem impotent to people in many churches, don't they? Because they've never experienced the richness of fellowship among true believers walking in harmony. They'll never know that.

So they've always been in such polluted churches, so filled with unregenerate people, that the potency of this is not there in the past. It doesn't mean as much to them. If people would withdraw their fellowship, what would that mean? It doesn't mean much of anything to them, you see.

But if you've ever known it, you know that this is a very powerful thing to do. It's the most powerful thing a church can do to remove its fellowship from an individual. Now what does that mean? Look at the terms here.

Look at verse 2. Look how strong they are. Verse 2, would be removed, he says, from your midst. Or verse 5, deliver such a one to Satan.

Verse 7, clean out the old. Verse 9, not to associate with immoral persons. Verse 11, again, not to associate with any so-called brother, if he is such and such.

And then in verse 13, remove or expel the wicked man from your midst. Now you can't do any questioning in your mind what's happening here. We must absolutely withdraw our fellowship from them.

Remove them from us. Expel them from us. Deliver them over to Satan.

It's very clear here. Now some people make a mistake, I think. And they say, well, what we'll do is we'll deal with this person and then we will consider him.

Usually they're thinking of Matthew 18 terminology. We'll consider him a heathen, an IRS man. But that doesn't mean he can't come among us because he just has to come as a nonbeliever then among us.

And he's just a, you know, he's not a member but he's a nonbeliever. However, I think the language here is absolutely clear. He's not to have any relationship with you in terms when you're meeting for fellowship.

You're not to have any fellowship with him at all, you see, and especially when you assemble. So again, the act of fellowship in the Lord's Supper, that's probably where I should have inserted that idea, but the act of fellowship in communion happening every week would indicate this, of course, very clearly. You're not even to eat with such a one.

You're not to be this fellowship. So don't make that mistake. He's not to meet with you.

It's very clear that he should not gather with you. The meetings of the church, of course, were principally believers' meetings, weren't they? We have an idea today that the meetings on Sunday are production meetings. They're evangelistic meetings.

That's why we do it. That's why we gather on Sunday so we can increase the church size and reach people and so forth. But that's not the intent of the early church.

The early church, it was a believers' meeting, and the nonbeliever might wander in, but it was principally a believers' meeting, and you're not to allow the person to have fellowship with you in there. Now, a last observation. Look at this.

He says here in verse 12, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? There again, clarity about the use of the word judgment. But those who are outside God judges. Expel the wicked man from among yourselves.

Of course, he is quoting here from Deuteronomy, various places in Deuteronomy where that phrase is used. Interestingly, in Deuteronomy, the implied imperative of the passage in the Old Testament passages in Deuteronomy is singular, but here it's in the second person, plural. You all.

So he's expecting the church as a whole to take action. So let me make this observation here. Failure of the church to purge wicked people from among them is flagrant disobedience.

It is flagrant disobedience. This is not really, this is not put to us in the form of an option. It is given to us in the form of a command.

You have to do this. You have to do this. And if the church who is the one to act in the final analysis is not there, then you must do everything within your own might to get that church to the place where they can handle this and do this, preferably before the situation arises.

But you must do it. You must prepare them for this. It's vitally important.

And I'm afraid that there are many churches, many otherwise good churches, that simply will not act on the imperative of the Lord in disciplining people in their church when necessary. Now let me end with this. I wish I had more time.

There's much more we could say. But let me just tell you why this is so important to me, really for a couple of reasons. One is we started a new church about a year and a half ago, and this very week we are dealing with our first case of serious discipline.

And I am so thankful, so thankful, not that that's happening. It's a grievous thing. I mean it's brought many tears and concern, a great deal of concern to us.

But it's an obvious case, and I am so thankful we prepared ahead of time for it. The document that you have there in that book that I mentioned, that's our document, the one we worked through and dealt with. It took us months to really get it where we felt like we were representing the Scripture the right way.

But I am so thankful we took action ahead of time on this, prepared ourselves for it. I believe the people will stand all together in harmony in dealing with this. And as sad as it is, I believe in the long run the church will be much stronger for it.

Though I'm still hopeful of the man's repentance, even at this last hour. But there's another reason. I don't always share this, but many years ago, some years ago rather, my father, let me back up, let me say something else.

My father is 89, almost 89, minister of the gospel for many, many years. His father was a preacher. He was a preacher's kid.

And a great, of course, probably the greatest influence in my life, as you can imagine. Recently, we took my 89-year-old father on a trip. We took him through Arkansas.

And this is where he grew up. He'd been in some other places in his ministry. But we took him to these places in Arkansas, 12 different towns, little towns you've never heard of, basically, where he grew up, where he was converted.

We found the church in Cotter, Arkansas. You've never even heard of that, have you? But a little town where he was converted. We found the steps of the building, though there was no building, where he preached his first sermon.

What a moving moment that was. Where he was ordained, we took pictures of him and had him tell the story on the steps of the old building. It's now Masonic Lodge, of all things.

But we were able to see the old building there. And we went through papers in churches and found minutes and where his dad had preached and done this and that. It was a moving time.

It was just last week. And I strongly, by the way, recommend that you do this for your parents. It just was a wonderful thing to do.

And all the siblings were all together. We just went in one car and we went around for three days. We did this until late at night most nights.

And one of the stops that we had was at my mother's grave in Warren, Arkansas, down south in Arkansas, the first time my father had seen it. My father, some years ago, as a denominational worker for the Baptists in Oklahoma City, in a classic situation, began to counsel his secretary about her marriage, became the authority that her husband was not, and it was not long until he committed adultery. And in a tragic way, right at the end of his ministry, he was just coming to the end of his more public ministry there as a worker.

He was just coming to retirement. He committed this awful sin. And, of course, we were devastated.

All my brothers were preachers. My sister married a preacher. So my dad's had a huge influence on people in that denomination.

So it was an awful thing. And within a short time after this, he felt that he must divorce my mother. He divorced her.

She got Alzheimer's then. Within two years, she had passed away, and we had buried her in Warren. The Alzheimer's probably aggravated, of course, by the tension of the situation.

And there are many, many things I could say about that very interesting story of how my mother was such a forgiver. And in the process of her Alzheimer's, my father repented, of course, and that itself was a very moving experience. He actually flew to the town where she died, and though she was unconscious of things, he stood there and confessed his sin to her and wept there before her and I believe was thoroughly repentant.

He said, I've lived all these years. Every day I get up regretting what a stupid thing I've done. Well, he married the woman that he committed adultery with also in this process.

So he was now seeing the grave of his wife of 47 years for the first time. You can just imagine. I wish I could describe to you the catharsis, the tears that we all cried.

He just hung his head and put his head on my brother's shoulder, the oldest son, and just wept at this. I asked him a question related to that, and we talked freely about this whole thing, of course, because he is truly repentant about it. I asked him, I said, you know, there was a time, Dad, when we went to your church in Oklahoma City and we asked the pastor of your church to practice church discipline on you, but they wouldn't do it.

He was such a prominent man in that denomination and he just wouldn't do it. Made all kinds of excuses, never did a thing. Dad, do you think had they enacted church discipline on your behalf, it would have made a difference? He said, yes, I certainly do.

I don't believe I could have gone through with what I did. Now, maybe I am capable. He was a very humble man about all this, but he said I really think it would have been more than I could have handled.

I believe I would have had to stop. So you can see why I get a bit burdened about the idea of church discipline. There may be many people like my father out there who could be stopped.

It's not true that everybody you discipline is going to repent. It's not true. In fact, I would say most of them will not repent.

What about that true believer that falls into sin? You can turn him away from his sin and cover a multitude of sins. Don't you love that person that much to do what Christ has commanded you to do? It is an act of love, isn't it, for us to discipline people? Please, man, I'm just begging you from personal experience, many experiences really through the years, I'm begging you. Don't let this one go by.

Do what Christ says to do. Take the measures to get your church where they need to be and do this when necessary for the good of the church and the kingdom of God. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Father, we are grateful for the clarity of Scripture, how important these words are, Lord, today. You included them in the Scriptures for the very reason for us to talk about them like we have today. How significant.

Please, Lord, help us not to be foolish and forgetful and unattentive to the things that you have called us to do, but help us to remember this vital element of church life and to shore up our thoughts and our plans in this area. Give these men grace and power to lead their churches in that direction. We pray this now in Jesus' name.

Amen. Have a break.

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