

Immorality in the Church, Part 1: Delivering the Immoral to Satan

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Code: 1823

Immorality in the Church

This morning we come to a study of the Word of God that is very important, very serious study. It's in the first letter to the Corinthians in the 5th chapter. We are studying together, I Corinthians, and we've come to chapter 5. We're gonna go half-way through our chapter or about half-way and finish it up next time, Lord willing. It's a brief chapter, only 13 verses, and yet it is so loaded with pertinent information and up-to-date themes that we have to deal with it with some carefulness. And, consequently, we have to kind of string it out for a little bit. And we will do so, I trust, with great benefit to our individual lives and to the church as well.

I suppose if there is one way to characterize the society in which we live today, we would have to call this the sexy '70s. And I say that because that seems to be the thing that dominates everything. Every product that is sold, is sold with some overture in that area. Movies have gone to the place where pornography is matter of fact, every day routine. We are constantly having propagated to us the fact that sexual activity is just like eating and drinking. It's a biological necessity. You do it; it doesn't amount to anything more than that. We have problems with morality and immorality. Our world has pretty well developed a barnyard morality. In fact, we've even done some things that animals don't do. We've exalted homosexuality and I'm not sure there ever was such a thing as a homosexual animal. But we've gone to the place where all kinds of things have become commonplace and it's a reason to have a group and to exist as a minority with a problem. And even the church begins to serve the wishes of certain people with sexual aberrations and on and on and on it goes. And this is the kind of society that threatens the purity of the church. It is difficult and always has been, historically, whether you're talking about Israel or the New Testament church, for God's people to exist as an island in a sea of paganism and not be affected by it. It always happens. And that is precisely what occurs here in I Corinthians. The Corinthian church was truly an island in a sea of paganism and particularly, the waves the immorality were washing over this little island. And the Corinthian church had been infested with immorality. And more than that, it had become tolerant of it.

I feel that one of the securities that we have against sin is our being shocked by it. I'll say that again. One of the securities we have against sin is our being shocked by sin. But in our society that is very difficult. Nothing really shocks us anymore. The media has communicated sexual aberrations through its music, radio, television, books, paperbacks, magazines and on and on and on it goes to

the place where it's almost with an indifferent attitude that we look at any of it.

Now, so far in the letter to the Corinthians we have found that their problem was built around division. There were problems of fighting and quarreling within the church. And they were pretty much based on philosophical or intellectual sins. That is, some of them were attached to certain human philosophies and some of them were attached to certain human leaders and it was more the psychological, philosophical-type sin. But when we get to chapter 5, we find that they were also plagued by the fleshly, physical sins as well. And I think this usually is the case. I don't think sin exists in isolation. Where you find some kind, you're bound to find the other kind, too. It just kind of comes along. If you've got people walking in the flesh, it's gonna manifest itself just about every way you can cut it. And that is true in Corinth. Their sins were not all intellectual; they were just as physical and fleshly.

And so we come to chapter 5 of I Corinthians and Paul stops dealing with division in the church...that was his first four chapters...and now he deals with immorality in the church. And we have a situation here of sexual immorality that was actually shocking to the pagans. Now, when the sin of the church shocks the world, we've got a problem. And that's precisely what had happened in Corinth. And it wasn't as if they didn't know what God's standards were. Of course they knew. They knew because the apostle Paul had written to them a previous time. Verse 9, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators," he says in verse 9 there. They knew what to do. They had already heard from him. They had, as well, had him as their teacher from the beginning. They had had Apollos and they had had some representation of Peter. If not Peter himself, somebody from Jerusalem closely connected to Peter who would've taught them, not only the New Testament truth, but certainly the Old Testament principle of how God viewed sexual immorality. In spite of all of this information and in spite of all of what they knew by the witness of the Holy Spirit in their lives, certainly a convicting enough agency, they continued to allow immorality in the church. And the fact that they had had a low style of life before they became Christians and that their life was so saturated with sexual immorality became a problem because they couldn't seem to shed that lifestyle once they became believers. And so they were very lax in dealing with this problem. And yet if the church was to be pure, they had to say goodbye to immorality. In I Corinthians 6:18 Paul puts it very simply. He says "Flee fornication." The word is porneia from which we get pornography and it means immorality. Run from immorality. Have absolutely nothing to do with immorality. He said to Timothy in I Timothy 5:22, Timothy, "keep thyself pure." It is basic to any kind of effectiveness in the ministry of Christ and the church of Christ that there be moral purity.

Now, this isn't anything new. Immorality has always been unacceptable to God. Always. You can go back into the book of Genesis, the very first things that God ever recorded, and you find an incident where Joseph was in Egypt and he was staying in the house of Potiphar. And Joseph was a pretty sharp looking guy and Potiphar's wife got kind of hung up on him. And so she chased him into the bedroom one day and made passionate advances and he took off. He did exactly what you should

do; he fled fornication. He just took off running and his comment was, "how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He recognized that the number one violation involved in immorality is not myself or those involved or the secondary circle around it, but God. David, of course, sinned with Bathsheba grossly, but in seeking a pure heart, he acknowledged this sin and he said, "against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight," Psalms 51:4. The recognition that immorality was an offense to God came from the very beginning of the Old Testament. God is always offended by sexual impurity. Any sex outside marriage, any sex before marriage is offensive to God.

Now, the key word, look at it in verse 1, is the word "fornication." You may have the translation "immorality." "It is reported commonly that fornication exists among you, and such fornication as is not so much as existing among the Gentiles," or heathen, "that one should have his father's wife." Now, the word fornication is the word porneia. Here it means a case of incest. There was a case of incest going on continuously in the Corinthian assembly. But the word is a general word meaning any kind of sexual involvement. The word adultery means sex outside of the marriage, a married person having sex outside his marriage. That's the particular sin of adultery. Fornication is a general term that would include adultery, incest, lesbianism, homosexuality, any kind of perversion, bestiality, sexual relations with animals; anything would be included in the term porneia. Pornography is our word today. The root word, porne, means a harlot for hire. The masculine form, pornos, means a male prostitute. But it started out to mean that and the Greeks just filled it out so that it meant every vice and they were really big on them. In fact, in Corinth and Athens, you have the seat of most of the immorality. They, according to historians, were the two most immoral cities. Even their worship was immoral. They had prostitutes in their temples where the people went to worship. Now, the Greeks view of life was this idea that sex was a biological urge, just as much as taking a drink of water or getting some sleep or exercise or eating. Sex just was there and whatever happened, happened and it was fine. Live it up, no hang-ups. And that doesn't sound like it's too old fashioned, really. It sounds like, kind of, up-to-date. I remember seeing a quote from Hugh Hefner, "Sex is a biological necessity. Find yourself a girl who's like-minded and let yourself go. It's no different than eating and drinking." Well, that is exactly what the Greek view of sex was. But interestingly enough, though they gave absolutely no sacredness to it, though they gave absolutely no assent to the fact that it had some kind of a pure context, they also forbid any woman to do it outside of her marriage, while a man could do anything he wanted. That'll give you some idea who ran things in those days.

Now, God of course, had made Himself abundantly clear about how He felt about any kind of sexual impurity. Any kind of sex activity, any kind of relationship between a man and a woman before marriage, absolutely forbidden by God, in fact, so seriously forbidden by God, that I would draw your attention to Deuteronomy, chapter 22. And, incidentally, unless you get both of these messages, this one and the next one, they're not gonna have the full picture of this whole subject. So I just kind of encourage you. I know most of you will be here, but keep that in mind cause we will not cover everything today. Deuteronomy 22:13...now this is a very interesting little insight here. In the

Pentateuch, the Law of Moses, God laid down His basic attitudes. Here's one of them. "If any man take a wife and go in unto her and hate her..." Now, that's kind of serious. You just get married and you go in and you hate your wife. "...and give occasions of speech against her and bring up an evil name upon her and say, 'I took this woman and when I came to her I found her not a virgin...'" Now, if a man married a woman, it was assumed she would be a virgin. I mean, it was just assumed that you would be pure. God never assumes impurity. He assumes purity and impurity is a violation of the assumption. So God says, now, what happens if a guy marries a woman he assumes to be a virgin, he goes in unto her and he finds out that she is not a virgin and as a result of that, because of his feelings of the need for purity and his high moral standards, what is he gonna do. Well, verse 15, "...then shall the father of the damsel and her mother take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate." In other words, if there was some evidence, some physical evidence that she was in fact a virgin, then that should be delivered to the elders of the city in the gate. And the elders always met there at a place by the gate. "And the damsel's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man in marriage and he hated her. And, lo, he has given occasions of speech against her, saying, 'I found not thy daughter a maid,' And here are the proofs of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver"...that's a lot, a tremendous amount..."and give them to the father of the damsel because he has brought up an evil name on a virgin of Israel, and she shall be his wife and he may not put her away all his days." Now, the idea here was to protect the girl from slander by a man. If he couldn't prove it, the price was astronomical that he had to pay and then, in turn, he had to stay married to her. But what if, what if (laughter) what if he went into the situation and he was right, she wasn't a virgin. Verse 20: "But if this thing is true and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel, they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die..." You think God is very stern about premarital sex. Very stern...stoning. "...because she has wrought folly in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house, so you put the evil away from among you. If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband"...here's adultery..."then both of them shall die, both the man that lay with the woman and the woman, so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. If a damsel who is a virgin be betrothed unto a husband"...not yet married, but sort of an engagement thing..."and a man find her in the city and lie with her, you shall bring them both out unto the gate of the city and stone them with stones that they die..." Now, you know what the plea of the girl would be? Well, I couldn't help it, I couldn't... And so the answer comes here. "...because she cried not, being in the city." You understand? If she'd have hollered, she was in the city. If she'd have hollered, somebody would have rescued her and the fact that she didn't holler was consent. "...the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife..." So they are both to be killed. "But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field and the man force her"...that is, rape her, out where she can't cry for help..."and lie with her, then the man only that lay with her shall die." Now, all of that is just to show you how God feels about immorality. It was the cause of execution in the Old Testament. There's no place for it. Now, some people think that God is a cosmic killjoy wanting

to prevent everybody from the natural processes and from the enjoyment of life. And the fact of the matter is that when you do it God's way, you reap the fullest kind of reward and the fullest kind of blessing because that's the way God designed you to be fulfilled. And this is an aberration of God's plan. Now, there are many other passages that deal with the same thing. You can study Leviticus 19:29, Leviticus 21:9. Read Proverbs 6:24 to 35 and you'll find God's same perspective is given repeatedly on the subject.

Now, as you come to the New Testament, nothing really changes because the New Testament carries over God's same attitude toward this kind of life. There is to be no sexual immorality. You find it in the gospels, the Lord speaking of harlotry and the Lord speaking about immorality and the Lord speaking about adultery and constantly bringing it up and saying that porneia, any kind of immorality, and the kingdom of God are incompatible. And the apostles said the same thing. Look at I Corinthians...we're there...chapter 6 and verse 9. It says this. "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate"...that could be something such as transvestites, people who wear the garb of women, usually is what it's used to refer to..."abusers of themselves with mankind,"...some kind of sexual masochism or sadism...those kinds of people, verse 10 at the end says, "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." In other words, that kind of living is incompatible with God's kingdom. And so we find that the Bible makes it clear that God feels very strongly about this kind of activity. In I Corinthians 10, you remember that when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they had committed all kinds of sexual acts at the foot of Mt. Sinai while Moses was getting the law. Remember? They made a golden calf and had a big orgy. Well, God came down and, well, how did God respond to their sexual activity? Verse 8, I Corinthians 10, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed and fell in one day, twenty-three thousand." God just took the life, instantly and sovereignly, of 23,000 people who did that. And there's a reason that He did. In verse 11 it says "All these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come." They not only were for their benefit, but they are written and recorded for our benefit, that we might know how God feels about that kind of activity. The Bible, then, is very clear about what God thinks regarding sexual immorality. And it is so serious that Paul attacks the problem in Corinth with a vengeance.

Now, Paul has laid down some basic feelings about this that come, of course, from the Holy Spirit and I Thessalonians 4, verse 3 says "this is the will of God, even your sanctification"...and the word means purity. God's will is that you be pure..."that you should abstain from immorality." There is to be no immorality, not sexual activity, not sexual promiscuity, that is fooling around, short of the sexual act itself, nothing of these things being effeminate, masochism, sadism, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, all of that category is forbidden. Abstain from it. "Possess your body in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of evil desire like the heathen who know not God," and especially for Christians is this unthinkable. People, sex is a very sacred thing. Whenever I hear anybody tell a dirty joke about sex, it's very, very offensive to me. Not just because of the crudeness of it, but because of the

sacredness of sex. There's a great statement by Stewart Babbage in his book entitled "Sex and Sanity." This is what he says: The Christian attitude to sex is, above all, one of reverent responsibility. Christians do not joke about sex, William Temple said, for the same reason they do not joke about the sacrament of holy communion. It is not that sex is nasty; it is that sex is sacred and to joke about it is profanity. Sex is a God-given endowment to be kept in trust for the beloved, that person to whom one is able to offer one's self in the glad and responsible union of lifelong marriage, end quote. [Sorry, not sure if he's quoting Babbage or Temple] It's a sacred thing. The world doesn't see its sacredness. We must. And here in the church...if ever there is to be any consciousness of what is sacred, it should be in the church...the church at Corinth is tolerating incest. Incredible thing!

Now, Paul's gonna deal with it. And if I were to title this chapter, I would title it Disciplining an Immoral Christian. What does the church do, what do the elders of the church do, the leaders of the church or any Christian in the church, when they discover somebody in the congregation living in immorality? And I'm confident, knowing the world like I know it and knowing the situation like I know it, that there's probably somebody right here in this congregation, maybe more than one, surely more than one, who are in this very situation right now. What is the church to do? What is the instruction for disciplining an immoral member of the body of Christ, an immoral Christian. There are four things we'll cover: the need, the method, the reason and the sphere or the limits of that discipline.

Let's look, number one, at the need. The first thing you have to do in the church is to see the need. There has to be recognition. The church can't do anything about immorality until it recognizes it. Therefore, we must be on the watch for such activity. We must be concerned with preventing it. We must be concerned with seeing and looking and watching that it does not exist. And where it does exist, we must hasten to act. But first of all comes the recognition. Verse 1, follows really verse 21 where he says I'm coming to you shortly, verse 19, and you decide whether I bring a rod or whether I come in love and gentleness. And here's one way you can decide. Clean up this immorality and I'll come lovingly; if it's still there when I get there, some heads are gonna roll. Verse 1, "It is commonly being reported," present tense, and the word commonly literally means generally...it is the general and continual report "that fornication exists among you..." Now, how would you like that to be the report about a church? The thing that's so well known about this church is that there were fornicators in it. What a testimony. The common word that comes around about you is that you are fornicators...that fornication exists in your church. And not only that, it is such immorality, or such pornography, "as is not so much as existing"...not the word "named" but..."is not so much as existing among the pagans..." You realize that the church is shocking the world with its sin? You're doing something the pagans don't do and we know from the law of the Romans, from Catullus, from Cicero and from Euripides, that incest was forbidden in the Roman Empire. And here was the church doing something that even the pagans didn't do. The sin was a man having relations with his father's wife. Now, that term, his father's wife, means his stepmother. If it meant his mother it would say his mother. But the term, his father's wife, is a scriptural paraphrase for stepmother. It's used for that

many, many places. Now, what happened here was likely this. There was a man and probably his first wife had died or whatever. He remarries a second wife. He's got a son. His son starts to be attracted to his father's new wife, not something that hasn't ever happened since, believe me. And so pretty soon this relationship between the son and the stepmother begins to grow and it becomes a sinful relationship. And what happens is a divorce. The reason we believe it's a divorce has occurred is because the sin is fornication, not adultery. Fornication is the sexual immorality outside the marriage, most likely. If it had been that he was having relationships with his father's wife who was still his father's wife, it would have been an adulterous situation cause she would have been married. So likely, the son has brought about a divorce. The wife is now freed from that guy and now she has joined herself to the son and they are living together. They are having a relationship. So he's stolen his father's wife. Now, there are three features of the relationship that I think are evident. The present tense at the end of the verse, one is continuing to have his father's wife, means that the relationship was a lasting relationship. It was a continuous, permanent relationship, not a one-time thing, not a momentary thing, but a permanent deal that had been arranged. Here was this poor man, now he was on the outs, he had lost his wife to his own son...incest. The second feature is not only the lasting continuous nature, but the second thing is that, likely, there was a divorce, and I mentioned that, that already, the divorce had taken place. The third thing is that the woman was not a Christian. And so here is a guy who had no right to do what he did and on top of fooling around with his father's wife to the place where she divorces the father and has a relationship with him, she is not even a Christian. And so he is unequally yoked with her. And so the whole thing smells from top to bottom, the stealing of the wife, the illicit relationship and with an unbeliever.

Now, in the Old Testament, any time somebody did that with a stepmother, that was considered to be incest. And God knew why, because you couldn't have that kind of thing in a family. That would destroy families. And I want to show you why I believe that it's clear that this is incest. Leviticus 18...Leviticus 18...it talks here about uncovering nakedness or seeing the nakedness throughout this chapter and that has to do with sexual relationships. But in 18:6, "None of you shall approach to anyone that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness. I am the Lord." God says, when I say it; I mean it. And I'm God and that means I'll do something about it. I am the one in control. So you don't have any relationship, you don't marry or approach or uncover the nakedness of anybody related to you. That's forbidden. "The nakedness of thy father or the nakedness of thy mother shalt thou not uncover. She is thy mother. Thou shalt not uncover her nakedness." That's incest with your own mother or father. But, verse 8, "The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover. It is thy father's nakedness." In other words, you're violating the father's rights. You shall not take your father's wife. And it goes on, all the way through verse 18, to talk about more and it even broadens it out in the rest of the chapter about all kinds of defiling sexual lusts. Verse 19, "...not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness..." further describes why and then carnally lying with your neighbor's wife and defiling her and it goes all the way down and it always connects this immorality with idolatry because the two went together. In chapter 22 of Deuteronomy and verse 30, the same statement is made; you're not to lie with your father's wife.

So, here in the Corinthian assembly was this terrible and flagrant rejection of a simple command of God. Lust had taken over in this guy's life. He was now living in an illicit relationship with this woman who was not a Christian and who was his father's former wife and the church was tolerating it. And it wasn't so much the sin that shocked Paul, as it was the church's toleration of it. That's the thing he couldn't believe. And look what he says in verse 2, "And you are puffed up,"...and you are arrogant, present tense, you continue to be proud even in spite of this. You really think you're hot stuff as a church. You're bragging about, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, you're bragging about your worldly wisdom, you're bragging about your spiritual attainments. Later on in the book, he'll say, you're the ones with all the spiritual gifts, you're the ones who come behind in no gift, he said in chapter 1, you're the ones who always speak in tongues and you're the ones who are always claiming these great things from God. What are you doing boasting when you're tolerating incest in your congregation? There's something wrong. That's the whole point, see. And still you're proud, he says, still you're puffed up. You should rather have done...what? What does he say?...mourned. Instead of standing there being proud about your situation, you ought to be on your face in the ground weeping. The word mourned there is the same word used to mourn for the dead. Here they were proud, boasting about all their spiritual attainments, about all the things they had done and they may have even been boasting about their liberty in Christ and using this sort of a thing as a good illustration of how free we are in Christ. Or maybe they weren't so much boasting about the sin, but boasting about their wonderful gracious and kind and merciful tolerance of it. In their pride they had missed the cancer that was gonna destroy the whole thing. They thought they had everything. Paul says, and you are still proud. Incredible. And this is going on. You should have mourned. I really think that when the church gets to the place where it doesn't mourn over sin, it's on the way out. You're right on the edge of the disaster. When we cease to be shocked by sin, then we've really lost our defense. Then we just don't care anymore. It was sin that killed Jesus. Did you know that? And you can't take it lightly. The church cannot tolerate sin...any kind. We're not just here to get up on Sunday morning and give sermonettes for Christianettes and little platitudes to make you feel better. This isn't just a Sunday morning/Sunday night operation. We're here to get involved in your lives, to make sure that the church is what God intended it to be and that involves purity. And if we find out about sexual immorality, we have in the past done something about it, we are in the present doing some things about some we know of, and we will continue to in the future because that's what God has called us to do to keep His church pure. In fact, you know, wherever there is immorality in the church, there should be discipline. And that's one good thing to do in the church because it tends to keep the tares out. You know, unbelievers don't flock to a church where they discipline people. Like Ananias and Sapphira, they sinned and they dropped dead and the word went around town, don't join that church, one false move and, whoo, it's curtains, see (laughter). That's one way to keep the church pure. In Revelation, our Lord wrote the letters to the churches. And in Revelation 2:18 He wrote to the church of Thyatira. And He says, I know your works. You got a lot of things going. You got the big operation there, your love, your service, your faith, your patience, your works and the last are even better than the first. You're even growing, progressing, things are really going great guns.

But I want to tell you; I have something against you. You allow that woman, Jezebel...now we don't know her real name, but calling her Jezebel would certainly have gotten to the issue...she "calls herself a prophetess and she teaches and seduces servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her space to repent of her fornication...she repented not...I will cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent...I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts and I'll give unto every one of you according to your works." Now, He gets real serious about this. You got somebody there tolerating fornication, propagating fornication, seducing people to commit it, you better get rid of that person before I come in terrible judgment. The church cannot tolerate sin. In II Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 20, Paul writing his second letter to the Corinthians, still worried about this problem because even though he'd stated in his first letter we're studying now, and even though there had been a measure of repentance and cleaning up, he knew the problem wasn't over with. You just get one immoral situation fixed up and another one comes. So in II Corinthians 12:20 he says, "I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as you would not..." Now, what he means by that is, I know what's gonna happen when I get there. I'm gonna come in a way you didn't expect me and I'm gonna find you in a way I didn't expect you. And what I'm afraid we're gonna find is that you are in "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, conceit and disorders." And I'm gonna come bewailing you because you haven't...in the middle of verse 21..."repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which [you've] committed." There is no place for the toleration of evil, immorality in the church. The church must be pure. And the job and the responsibility of the church is not just to go and attend and sit there and watch what happens, but to seek out the purity of the church. In Ephesians, chapter 5, it says you are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." That means correct them, rebuke them, speak against them. If you know somebody in immorality, it's your responsibility as a Christian before God to go to that individual and if they don't hear you, to take a witness, and if they don't hear them, to bring it to the church leaders. That's for the purity of the church. That responsibility belongs to you. You should mourn.

Now, look at the objective here, verse 2. You should mourn in order that "he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you." That's excommunication. You need to get that person out of the church. You say, oh, my brother, but what he really needs is the church. Yeah, but we don't need him. He doesn't do us a bit of good cause he just brings about impurity. Discipline is a part of the responsibility of the church. He is to be excommunicated, put out. This is discipline. This is a divine act. I mean, it says in Hebrews 12, verse 6, "whom the Lord loves He chastens, and every son He scourges." This is a divine thing. God does it. It's commanded. Go back to Matthew 18 and look at that sequence. Matthew 18:15, "If a brother shall trespass...go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone...he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." I've had that happen to me, a situation where there was immorality about to go on, I found out about it. And I found out where it was gonna happen and I happened to find out the right phone number and I dialed the right phone and I just said, Hello, this is John at the church. What's going on? Whee!...you know. (Laughter)

Well, it happened and I thank God. But you know what happened; I gained my brother because in tears of repentance he said, I didn't think anybody would care enough to even call. And he packed up and left and that was it. And that's the first obligation of every Christian. We've had other situations where there wasn't a hearing and then we took two. And then they didn't respond and then we put them out of the church and we've done it publicly. This is the pattern. He says go to him alone. If he hears you, great, if he doesn't, verse 16, take one or two more that it might be established in a legal manner. Then if he doesn't hear, tell it to the church and treat him as a heathen. He's acting like a heathen because he's refusing to submit to the elders. So if that's what he wants, then treat him that way, like a heathen or a tax collector. And you have to remember, the tax collectors in the Bible were different than tax collectors today (laughter). If you happen to work for the IRS, you're a nice person, I'm sure. But in those days, those guys were crooks. So that's the idea there. They should add that footnote that they were crooked tax collectors (laughter). It makes it hard to evangelize people in that category (laughter). So the Word of God is very clear, then, about the approach that is to be made. This is something that we are to deal with. And he says to them, you should not be going along, oh, isn't our church great? You know, can you imagine how many churches are in that very identical situation? They're saying, boy, the church is growing and God is blessing and we're doing this and we're doing that and all the gifts of the Spirit are here and wonderful things are happening. And if Paul was around, he'd say yeah, and there's incest in your congregation. There's immorality in your church. Some of your people are fooling around, some of your leadership people, some of your staff people, some of your important congregational members. And there you go, puffed up, waltzing along in some kind of spiritual bliss when you're not even dealing with the cancer that threatens to destroy the internal work of the church. So that's not uncommon. It's going on, I'm sure, all the time. Wasn't just Corinth, it happened as we saw, in Thyatira and many other places and continues to happen today.

The first thing that has to occur, you have to see the need, secondly, the method. Now, once you found the need is there and once you've discovered it and you people have to be the key to that...you know, I don't want you to get out your little Sherlock Holmes immorality kit and go around spying on everybody, but I do think that when it comes to your attention that this exists, you need to follow the procedure of Matthew 18. Now, what is the method? We come to that in verses 3 to 5 and that's as far as we're gonna get. What is the pattern to follow? All right, verse 3, "For I verily"...I truly..."as absent in body"...he says, I'm not even there; I'm not even in Corinth now, "but" I am sure "present in spirit," I "have judged already as though I were present concerning the one who has done this..." Here I am removed from you and I've already made my decision. You're there and you haven't done anything. I have even heard about this. Everybody knows this. This is the general report and everybody knows it and everybody knows that you know everybody knows it. And you don't do anything about it. This is your worldwide reputation, Corinthians. I have already made my decision; what's hanging you up? I already made my judgment "as though I were present," he says in verse 3. And what are you gonna do about it? Then in 4 and 5 he gives them the procedure for discipline in the church. Here it is: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and

my spirit"...that is with apostolic commendation, my agreement..."with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Now, there's the pattern. Now, watch what he says. Let's look at it in detail. There is to be a meeting of the church. You are to gather together. Now, you know what this says, people, very importantly? It is a great verse to give us indication of the autonomy of a local congregation. Paul can't play Bishop and he can't play Cardinal and he can't play Pope. He says you've gotta do this. The church has no higher authority than its local leadership, its own elders. Now, I'll come and agree with you in spirit and Jesus will be there, but you gather together in His Name and His power and you deliver that one to Satan. Now, notice what it means at verse 4, "in the Name of our Lord Jesus." What does it mean, "in the Name of our Lord Jesus"? Whenever you see this phrase, it always means this is what Jesus would want. Remember how we've seen that with prayer? When you pray in the Name of Christ, you're simply asking, cause this is what would be consistent with Christ. This is what Jesus would want. So if I'm asking that in reference to this, when I say the church comes together in the Name of the Lord Jesus, it means the church comes together...listen...to do what Jesus would do if He was there. What do you think would happen if the Lord came to the church at Corinth? What do you think He would do if He found out about this? He would just follow the same pattern of discipline, wouldn't he? Put them out, no different. I have often thought, wouldn't that be exciting if the Lord had sort of a pre-Rapture return and just came down and spent a couple of weeks shaping up Grace Church. (Laughter) You know, I mean, it'd be interesting to see whose house He'd visit and whose lives He would deal with. And I know where He'd start...right here. But the Lord is in His church. Do you believe that? He's in a church in the composite of Godly men who lead that church. And so he says, when you come together, you are acting by the authority of Jesus Christ. You are doing it in His Name. In other words, you are doing exactly what Jesus would do, come together and My spirit with you. Now, here's something else, and in "the power of the Lord Jesus." You not only have His authority and you not only have His presence, but you have His...what?...His power to carry it out. Sometimes discipline is hard. And you get kind of embarrassed and kind of shaky and you gotta confront somebody with some situation and you're kind of nervous. And you just say, Lord, I need Your power to be bold and I'm gonna go right into this thing and I'm gonna say what I need to say and I'm gonna do what I need to do and if it's to throw the person out of the church, we have to be bold and in Your power, we have to see it happen. That's exactly what this verse means. That's the way it's to be done. Not only in His authority, not only in His place, but in His power as the support. Now, let me give you an illustration. Go back to Matthew 18 and here are some of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible but we'll see if we can clear them up for you. Now, here we have Matthew 18:15. Again, this discipline process says go to him, if he doesn't hear take two more and go. If he doesn't hear, tell it to the church and excommunicate him. Now, verse 18, "Verily I say to you, Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in Heaven"...literally..."and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven." There are the two sides of justice. You bind somebody; they're guilty. You loose them; they're innocent. But look, I've heard people use that verse for every conceivable thing. Some

people say, we bind Satan and we loose the Holy Spirit. You see Satan anywhere in that verse? You see Satan anywhere in that whole passage? No. You see the Holy Spirit? No, no, it has nothing at all to do with binding Satan. I don't understand what that even means, but it doesn't have anything to do with this verse. It simply means this. Whatever your decision of justice in the church, will be agreed upon...where?...in Heaven. Don't be afraid to act in discipline. Heaven has already acted. Whatever you bind on earth shall already have been bound...where?...in Heaven. This verse is in the context of discipline, people. That's what it refers to. When the church acts in discipline, Heaven acts in support of the church. You see? Tremendous truth! And, again, and he knows there's gonna be a lot of sentimentalism here and a lot of people feeling bad about discipline and worrying about what's gonna happen to the poor guy that gets thrown out. Verse 19, "Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in Heaven." Now, had you ever heard that verse before? In what connection is it always used?...prayer. Have you ever heard it used with discipline? Probably not, but that's what it means. What he's saying is, if two of you agree...that's the minimum, legal requirement on God's standard...that this is worthy of discipline, then you proceed to do it and Heaven will be behind you. Because where two or three are gathered together in My Name for discipline, there am I...where?...in the midst. When the church comes together for discipline, people, it has the tremendous promise that Christ is in the midst. That's not talking about a prayer meeting or your kitchen coffee club or your little Bible study or your fellowship group; that's talking about the church coming together for discipline. And there is Christ in the midst. When we discipline, Christ acts right from the midst of that. The church, then, gathers together, has apostolic support, has the power of Jesus Christ and the authority of Christ and acts in discipline. Now, how does discipline work? "To deliver such an one to Satan..." Now, how do you do that? Do you take him to a séance? How do you deliver a guy to Satan? Simple. Satan is called by the Lord Jesus Christ, the prince of this world. All you have to do to deliver somebody to Satan is to put him out of the church into the cosmos, into the world. That's what it means. Somebody has forfeited his right to the fellowship simply because he is impure and he putrefies the fellowship; you just put him out. You are no longer permitted to attend. You are no longer permitted the fellowship in any way. You are out. That's the way it goes. You put him out into Satan's domain. Deliver him to Satan. Satan is the prince of this world, the god of this age. He runs the world system. That's where you send this individual. You say, is he a Christian? Yes. You say, why would you do that? Because the Lord says to do that. Because you don't need him destroying the church, corrupting it and not only that, corrupting its testimony.

Now, look at I Timothy 1:20. You don't need to turn to it. Listen. Paul had some other people he did the same thing to. He says "...Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." He did the same thing. He put them out of the church. He sent them out of the church. That's the ultimate act of discipline for the purity of the church. Put them out! Now, why?...for the destruction of the flesh...for the destruction of the flesh. Now, I take it that the term flesh, there, is in contradistinction to the term spirit. Spirit is the internal man; flesh is the

external body. Put them out of the church. Put them in Satan's world for the destruction of their body physically. Now, when Satan was turned loose in Job, chapter 2, on Job, how did he afflict Job? Could he do anything to Job's soul? Could he touch, could he lay a hand on a Job's spirit? Could he touch Job in the inner man? No. What could he do to Job? Only on the outside, make him sick, that's all he could do. Satan will be given the right under the judicial act of God to afflict a man physically. And that is precisely what Satan was allowed to do with Job. Now, for the Christian, there is nothing to fear. Even though this guy is delivered to Satan; Satan can't touch his spirit. Who does his spirit belong to?...Christ. That's why the verse ends by saying this: "...the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Turn him out for the destruction of the flesh, but that will not be a problem for his spirit. It will be delivered. Maybe a better way to translate the word there, the word saved, his spirit will be delivered in the day of the Lord Jesus. His whole lifetime may be one of physical anguish. His whole lifetime may be one of physical pain. His whole lifetime may be one of physical suffering. But in that day, his spirit will be delivered from that, and in this day as well. Satan may mess my body up, but he'll never touch my soul. And discipline...listen...came in the physical sense. For example, in Paul's situation where he said he had a thorn in his flesh, he called it a messenger of whom?...Satan. God uses Satan to discipline us in the physical. It says if you have a sickness, confess your sins. Why?...because a lot of your sickness is a result of your sin. You see, physical illness can be God's rod of chastisement. In I Corinthians 11, the Christians were fouling up the Lord's table, desecrating the love feast, fooling around with idols and Paul said many of you are weak and sick and some of you...what?...sleep. Again, physical pain, physical anguish, even death. Ananias and Sapphira even died. Even death can be a result of Satan when God allows Satan to be His rod against His own children. So you turn him over, his flesh will be destroyed by Satan, but his spirit will be delivered. Why? Because Satan can't touch the inner man. That's already redeemed forever. Right? And in the day of the Lord Jesus, when that day comes, that man will stand there with the redeemed, but he'll pay a price in this life. And, of course, remember this. The idea of this discipline is not to just wipe the guy out, but to change him. Wouldn't you agree? He said, I turned over Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme, that they might learn not to do this. You say, what happened to this guy? Did he get destroyed physically? Well, I'm sure he did. I don't know what kind of disease or what kind of anxieties or what kind of pressure or what kind of physical pain he went through, but I'm sure that he got the destruction of the flesh. You say, will he be in Heaven? Yes, he will, because Satan was given his flesh but not his...what?...not his spirit. That belongs to the Lord and in the day of the Lord Jesus, he will be there with the redeemed. But I like to think that he didn't die in this destruction. I kind of like to think that he got straightened out. Wouldn't you like to think that? That's just a good guess. But in II Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 5, there is the story of a man that Paul told them to chastise. And the man repented. He was thrown out and the man repented and Paul says to them, now, you confirm your love and take him back. I like to think that the man of II Corinthians 2:5-11 is the man of I Corinthians 5 and that he got it together and got straightened out. But this is how discipline is to work. Put him out, God will use Satan as the rod of chastisement to destroy him physically and Satan will be given his

flesh, but his spirit will be delivered so that in the day of the Lord Jesus he will appear with the redeemed.

Now, people, you see there the church's responsibility. The church is to come together, led by its elders, in the authority and with the attended power and presence of Jesus Christ, to excommunicate the immoral Christian so that Satan can afflict him with such affliction that it'll bring about a remedial change in his life drawing him back to the holiness that Christ wants. That's the idea. And even if he dies like that, Satan still doesn't have his spirit because that was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is the need for disciplining an immoral member and the method. Next time we'll see the reason and the sphere. Let's pray.

Father, again we are reminded this morning of the thoughts of the apostle Paul who said that he desired above all to present the church as a chaste virgin to Christ. And we think, too, of the words of our own Lord as they were expressed through the apostle Paul in Ephesians that the Lord Jesus saw the church as a bride, that he wanted espoused to himself pure, without blemish, without spot, holy and blameless. Father, we pray that we would do everything in our own lives to be pure morally; that we would do everything we can to be resistant to the inroads of the world system in the areas of immorality and vice, sexually. Father, help us to be the kind of pure believers that You redeemed us to be. And, Lord, then help us to look for the purity of the church, that when we know of such immorality, that it is our responsibility to go and to seek to see a change and to take someone with us if need be and even to tell the elders of the church that there might be a purifying in the church. Father, help us to take seriously Your Word to us. Help us to be as pure in practice as You've made us. And even though we know he can never claim our spirit, Father, we still don't desire that he should take the flesh and have that destroyed, and that anyone who knows You should go through the agony and the anguish of such suffering. And so, Father, keep us pure as only You are able through the Holy Spirit. In Christ's Name, amen.

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