Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Anatomy of the Church: The Internal Systems, Part 3
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Well, as you know, if you've been with us over the last few weeks, we've been endeavoring to share with you a little series, as an interlude in our study of Matthew, titled "The Anatomy of a Church," and just pull ourselves back to our own foundation. Very often, as a church grows it sort of grows like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It just starts tilting one way or another. And sometime along the way we need to sort of drop the plumb line and make sure we're going up straight off of our foundations. And that's really what we've been endeavoring to do in this brief series, is to go back and do a little archeology and dig up our footings and find out what it is that made us distinctive in the beginning, what it is we're really committed to.

I have a great desire that the church should be what Christ wants it to be. That is my great passion. I was being interviewed this week by a gentleman who's the editor of a magazine published by the Navigators, and the title of the magazine is Discipleship. It's a very fine magazine, and he asked me what my real desire for the church was, and I said, "My desire for the church is that the church would be what Christ designed it to be." That is the passion of the hearts of our elders and staff and, I know, of you folks, as well. And so in order to kind of keep us on track and to pick up the things we've forgotten, and to reaffirm the things we've remembered, we're going back through some of the basic elements of the anatomy of a church. What is God's design for the church?

Some years ago, when I taught ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, at Talbot Seminary, I had the students read a book called *God's Forgetful Pilgrims*. That book is an interesting little book written by Michael Griffiths from England. And in the book, among many helpful things, he said this, and this has kind of stuck in my mind: "Christians, collectively, seem to be suffering from a strange amnesia. A high proportion of people who go to church have forgotten what it's all for. Week by week, they attend services in a special building and go through their particular time-honored routine, but give little thought to the purpose of what they are doing. The Bible talks about the bride of Christ, but the church today seems like a ragged Cinderella, hideous among the ashes....She has forgotten that she's supposed to be growing up to be a beautiful lady." He's right in many ways. The church—as we view it in the broad terms across America—which is supposed to be the bride of Christ, is in a way a ragged Cinderella, and we need to reaffirm the non-negotiables, the essential elements of the church. We need to get back to what God designed us to be, and that's what we're endeavoring to do in this particular brief series; just touch base with major principles upon which the church must act.

We don't want to get into the situation of misevaluation, in other words, of evaluating the church by the wrong terms, the wrong principles. Gene Getz points out that this is done frequently. In his book, *The Measure of a Church*, he writes these things:

"Some say a mature church is an active church. They evaluate progress by the number of meetings held each week and the number of different kinds of programs going on....Some say a mature church is a growing church. As long as new people are coming and staying, they believe they are a maturing church. As long as the pastoral staff is enlarging, they believe all is well. Some say a mature church is a giving church. As long as people are contributing financially to the ongoing program of the church and supporting its many ventures, they believe it is a maturing church. Some say a mature church is a soul-winning church. They say this is proof positive. When people are bringing others, when we can account for regular professions of faith and regular baptisms, then, for sure we have a New Testament church....

“Some say a mature church is a missionary-minded church, a church that supports missions around the world, designating a large percentage of its overall budget to world evangelism....Some say a mature church is a smooth-running church, a church whose organizational machinery is oiled with every degree of regularity. It is a finely-tuned machine with job descriptions, eight-hour days, coffee breaks, and punch cards. Everybody does what he's hired to do on time and efficiently....

"Still others say a mature church is a Spirit-filled church. This is the church that is enthusiastic and dynamic and has lots of emotion and excitement. Everyone in it knows what his gifts are and uses them regularly....And finally some say the ultimate mark of maturity is the big church with thousands coming to Sunday School and church every Sunday. Maturity, to them, is represented by a large paid staff, scores of buses that pick up children, multiple programs or radio/television ministry, a Christian day school, a Christian college and seminary, and, oh, yes, a printing press to prepare its own literature....“Unfortunately,” says Getz, “some people really believe that what I have stated are actually Biblical marks of maturity."

Well, nothing wrong with those things. Nothing wrong with active, growing, giving, soul-winning, missionary-minded, smooth-running, Spirit-filled, big churches. But you could be all of that and be a cult. You could be all that and be a cult. That isn't the heart of it. That isn't the guts of it. That's why we're backing up from the flesh to talk about the anatomy that's behind the scene. What's in the, the inside, and as I said to you a few weeks ago, so often when pastors come here, they want to know about that external stuff, but we want to tell them about that internal stuff. That's the real issue we're talking about, not activities; we're talking, basically, about attitudes. Attitudes. The life systems that flow inside the church. Those are key. Those are key. Now, at first we talked about the skeleton, didn't we? We talked about how important it is that we have affirmed the non-negotiable, foundational, shaping form of the church: those things like a high view of God, the absolutely priority of Scripture, Scripture, doctrinal clarity, personal holiness, and spiritual authority. We said those are non-

negotiable, skeletal formation concepts. We have to have those.

And then after setting the skeleton in place, we said the church has to have certain internal systems. That is, like a body has flowing through it the systems that are its life, so the church must have flowing through it certain systems. These are attitudes; and, you see, that's what we're really after. We don't want the church to be mechanical. We don't want to be *inect*, it to be an external routine, a ritual, a performance, lest we hear from God the same thing the people of Israel heard through Amos the prophet, who said, "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters in righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

And Hosea saw the same truth. He said, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud and like the dew which goes away early. Therefore, I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth; and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

Or the words of Isaiah: "'What are your multiplied sacrifices to me,' says the Lord. 'I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity in the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals, appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me; I'm weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I'll hide my eyes from you; and when you multiply your prayers, I will not listen.'"

In other words, Israel was guilty of having external religion without proper attitudes; and that's what we're looking at. I really believe that the heart and soul of the ministry is to lay that skeletal foundation, and then spend your time trying to create in people right heart attitudes. That's what makes the church a beautiful lady. That's what builds the church up to the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ. Now, we've already looked at several of these internal attitudes. We've talked about obedience, humility, love, unity, service, joy, peace, and thankfulness. I want to consider three more this morning, and this isn't going to get us through. But I do want to look at these three, and I feel very strongly about them.

This is number nine in my list. I don't know how yours adds up, but this is a, a very essential attitude. Let's call it self-discipline. Self-discipline. Self-discipline. Oh, how important it is that we, as Christians, understand the need to conform to a divine standard, to live the disciplined life. Oh, you know what

self-discipline is? It's saying no to sin. It's saying no to sin; saying yes to good or to righteousness. That's, that's not too complicated a definition; and yet, it captures the truth. The disciplined life understands the law of God, and says no to anything outside the bounds of that standard.

Now, let me illustrate this to you. Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians, chapter 9; 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 24; and Paul picks a metaphor which is very familiar to us in this athletic society in which we live. It is the metaphor of a race, something we all understand. In verse 24, he says, "Know ye not that they who run in a race all run," that in a race, everybody in the race runs. That's pretty clear. "But one receives the prize." Now, in a race, everybody runs for a prize. “So run that you may obtain.” Now, you have to run to win the prize. That's the reason you're in the race. So we, as believers, have been called to a race, as it were; and that metaphor is used in several places in Scripture. We're running a race. Not only here, but elsewhere in the Word of God, that same imagery is presented to us. And as we run this race, we have in mind that we are running to win. Now, what is necessary to accomplish that goal? Well, verse 25 helps us. "And every man who [and the old English says] strives for the mastery [competes in athletics] is temperate in all things." What does that mean? Self-discipline; it’s self-discipline. He's got himself under control, and that is the substance of dedication to victory. I mean, obviously, a guy cannot get in a race to win who's thirty pounds overweight, or who is a victim of atrophying muscles. I mean there is a tremendously obvious discipline involved. When we think about the hours and hours daily and weekly and monthly and yearly that athletes put in to get to the level of victory, it's staggering.

A year from now, we will have already seen the 1984 Olympics in our city; and we will have been exposed by the media to all of the wonders of athletic endeavor; to all of the tremendous self-discipline of those who will go away with gold and silver and bronze medals. Victory in athletics on a world level demands an incredible price. It is not uncommon for athletes like that to train six to eight hours a day for five to ten years of their life and even more; tremendous amount of dedication. They literally push themselves past the point of any pain. They know what it is. We talk about second wind. They know what it is to go beyond second wind. They know what it is to go beyond the point of pain; and even tell us that there is a euphoria beyond pain that only the athlete can experience. And I've had enough athletics in my background to experience something of that euphoria. You talk about a high, there's a, there's an incredible sense of freedom, an incredible sense of energy that comes beyond the point of pain. It's hard to explain to someone who's never paid that price in an, in an athletic endeavor.

But Paul is saying, "Look, I'm in a race," and he's talking about a spiritual race, and he says, "In that race, I know that I want to win, and in order to win, I've got to get myself under control, So further he says, “I run [verse 26] not uncertainly." In other words, "I really know where I'm going. I stay on course." It's very much like Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, where he says a man who engages in athletic endeavor knows that if he is to win the crown, he must engage himself. And then he uses the word *nominos*, *according to the rules*. He's got to stay within the law. He's got to stay

within the limits. He's got to stay on the course. He can't cross the line. He can't go out of the circle. He can't get out of bounds. He can't leave the track. In other words, whatever the conformity of that event demands, he must stay within it if he's to be victorious. And that's what Paul is saying, "I want to win, so I give a maximum effort." And the verb used here of *striving for the mastery* includes self-discipline, self-sacrifice, great effort; and then that comes about by self-discipline and encompasses the idea of staying within the rules. And then in verse 27, it all comes together when he says, "I [literally] keep under my body." I literally keep it under control. I beat it into submission and "bring it into subjection," he says, lest that in preaching to others, which is my race, I myself should become disqualified by some sin. In other words, I don't want to be sinning and lose out on the spiritual victory any more than an athlete wants to be sinning against his body and against his training and lose out on a physical victory. And these athletes do put out a tremendous amount of energy, tremendous amount of effort.

I was talking last Monday to the Miami Dolphins, and I went down to do a Bible study with them, and I took them where I want to take you right now, to Ephesians, chapter 6. And they were just about ready to go down to the Coliseum to put on their armor to go out and lose, as it turned out, to the Raiders. And just the whole process of them, some of their ankles and legs were already taped up, and they were ready to go and do battle, and I took the occasion to share with them the fact that they had spent years of their life and tremendous hours and tremendous energy and tremendous time to come to a peak of athletic performance. And that, in the peak of that athletic performance, they would then go down, and they would put on their armor, and they would go out, and they would do battle, and they would do it to obtain a corruptible crown, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9. They do it to obtain a corruptible crown.

But I suggested to them that there was another far more important warfare than that, a spiritual warfare for an incorruptible crown, for an inheritance eternal, laid away in glory that never fades; that there was a warfare far more important than any football game in all of their life, and there, as for that warfare, an armor far more important than shoulder pads and chest pads and arm pads and helmets and hip pads and all the other stuff that you wear. There was a different armor. A vital armor if they were going to know victory in the spiritual warfare. And I introduced them to verse 11 of Ephesians 6, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." You've got to have your armor on. I said to them, "You're no more going to go out there and fight against the L.A. Raiders in your gym shorts than you ought to go out to fight against the enemy of your souls unprepared." "For we wrestle [It says in verse 12.] not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places." We are in a battle, and the battle isn't really with men. Men are only the pawns and the playthings of the unseen demonic world. The real battle is with demons. I know that well.

I will never forget the battle with the demon-possessed girl one night Jerry Mitchell and I endured as she kicked and screamed and threw furniture around a room; and I'll never forget walking in the room and hearing her say, "Get him out. Anybody but him, not him; don't let him in." And it was coming in a voice other than her own, and I realized the demons knew who I was. That's a frightening thing. When she started saying, you know, "Not him, not him," my human reaction was, *fine, I'm gone*. Then I began to realize that if they didn't, if they knew me and didn't like me, I must be on the right team; and I stood in the power of God against that situation; and we spent hours of agonizing effort there until God, in His grace, by her confession of sin, stepped in to purge and purify. But from that time on, I've never had a question about where the real battle is. I know where the real battle is. It's a serious battle on a spiritual level that is unseen; and men, as I said, are pawns and playthings in the hands of demons; and we have to understand the seriousness of the warfare wrought, really, against Christ and all who belong to Christ.

So we have to put on the armor, it says, to be able to stand. We have to be ready for this effort. I want to just point out two elements in verse 14. First, we must "have our loins girded about with truth." The Roman soldier wouldn't have thought of going into battle with his tunic just as gathered material flying around in a hand-to-hand combat for life and death. He would've become very vulnerable. He could've easily been pulled down by it, or it could've gotten in his way and caused his own death. And so he would put on a belt and pull it all tight and gather it all together so that it wouldn't be loose at all, but tightly pulled around him. And the apostle says that is the, the belt or the girdle of truthfulness or sincerity. It's really commitment that he's talking about. He's talking about self-discipline. He's talking about the person going into battle serious about the battle, pulling your act together, getting all the loose ends in, you're not kidding about the thing. I mean you're going to do what needs to be done, and I really believe, in this matter of self-discipline, that we, as Christians, need to get our act together. We need to start saying, "Here is the narrow path, and here is the way God wants us to walk, and here we will walk." And it isn't easy, because all along the path, the voices are calling to us to divert. And if we love pleasure more than we love God, if we love self-satisfaction more than we love God at any point in time, then we're gone off the track, and we have not exercised self-discipline, and entered into sin. And so you see the apostle Paul saying, "This is a war, and you better be serious, and you better pull up your, your tunic, cinch it together, in an act of real commitment to victory."

And then he goes on to talk about the breastplate of righteousness. A Roman soldier wore a plate over his chest to protect his vital organs; and, obviously, if he didn't have this, he was tremendously vulnerable to an arrow that could fly into his chest, to a knife that could be thrust in fatally. He wanted his armor, and the armor is righteousness or holiness, doing what's right, self-discipline to God's law or we're vulnerable.

We're in a race to win, and we've got to be disciplined to win, and we've got to have a life that is lived in obedience to God's will in a matter of purity. That's what Paul is calling us to. He says it another

way in 2 Corinthians 7:1. He says, "Having therefore these promises...” It's as if he is saying God has given you so much, dearly beloved, God has given you so much that “’you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty,” in chapter 6, verse 18. I mean all that is ours in being sons and daughters of God: Seeing that you have all of these things, “Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

I mean let's get the belt on, and let's get the breastplate on, and let's run the race to win the thing. Let's keep the rules and stay within the limits. Let's give a full, wholehearted effort. I grieve when I see undisciplined Christians. I grieve when I see Christians who have so much leakage in their life. Oh, there's a line of obedience, but they're always off it. They understand it. They're just not that committed to it. Paul says it yet another way at the end of Philippians, the last chapter, the 4th chapter and the 8th verse. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and...any praise [What?] set your mind on these things." Listen, folks, your self-discipline is a matter of where you put your mind, where you set your mind, where you set your thinking; because, “As a man thinks in his heart [What?] so is he. And a pure life and a self-disciplined life is wrought by a life that is saturated by the Word of God.

You see, the reason we teach you and give you the Word is so it's in there; and when you're confronted with temptation, the Spirit of God can draw you back to that Word that's planted there. The reason you are to read the Scripture and meditate on the Scripture is so that that Word may be resident in your heart. And then, as David said, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin." And so your thinking must be controlled with the Word of God. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," says Colossians 3. So that's the source of self-discipline. Then it demands a commitment on your part, and I'm concerned about this. I, I'm concerned that in Christianity, in our time, there is a lack of discipline. God hasn't changed His standard. God hasn't changed the narrow way or the narrow path. It isn't changed at all. God's law hasn't opened up any more than it was when God originally gave it; and the standard of obedience is the same. But Christians tend to have widened it themselves and created an artificial tolerance, and we have listened to the sirens of the world calling us off our course. Tragic.

This month, earlier in the month, I had occasion to go up to Oregon. I took Chris Mueller, our junior high pastor, with me; and we went up to speak to three thousand men out in the woods up there. We had a great time. God blessed. Some men came to Christ. Others were encouraged in faith and greater commitment. Wonderful, wonderful three days, and Chris and I talked a lot about things up there. He told me some things that were quite astounding to me—in working with junior high young people—that may help us to put a finger on where we really are in our Christian society. For example, he did a little survey at junior high camp this summer. Took fifty-four junior high kids and found that nine of the fifty-four had never seen an R-rated movie. Forty-five had. He took seventh-grade boys, and out of thirty-five seventh-grade boys, twenty-five had seen an R-rated movie. That's 12 years old

or so. Twenty-six had been reading, to one degree or another, pornographic magazines; and twenty-four out of those thirty-four go to Christian schools. And he went on to tell me about how many of them have in their home, home cable TV where they watched filth pumped in wholesale on the movie channels and all the rest of the garbage that comes with it.

I was really distressed by that. I was greatly distressed. Let me tell you something, people. You can't expose a seventh-grade kid to an R-rated movie without it making an absolutely devastating impact on his life or hers. There's no way that a seventh-grade mind can compute that without having negative responses. You can't look at 18-feet-high naked people without remembering that imagery. And if you are, if you have your head in the sand so much that you think your junior high kid can handle that, you are wrong. You need help. If you allow your junior high young person to go to an R-rated movie, you're contributing to their sin. You're jamming in their minds things they can't handle. If you allow them to sit at home and watch filth on a cable television station, then don't be shocked later on when they don't have any interest in the things of God, and don't say, "Well, we took him to church all the time."

It's devastating. Let me tell you another thing. If you go to an R-rated movie, you're contributing to your own sinfulness. You say, "Well, it's art." No, it isn't art. It's garbage, just plain garbage. You say, "Well, it has some social value. I mean it's, it's a comment on our culture." Sure, you think it's not going to be promoted that way? How else can they attract good, moral people and contribute to the devastation of their thinking? I mean there's no place in the life of a Christian for profanity that comes even out of a PG movie, let alone the nudity that comes out of those filthy things they call R movies. And if you go, you know why you go? You go because you've been so suckered by the world that you're a victim, not only of the thing you see when you sit there, but you're a victim of their advertising technique that got you there to start with. And I'm *cer*—I'm strong about this, because I feel so strongly in my heart: that you can't expect to cultivate godly thinking in people who are looking at massive images and incessant images of garbage, or who are funneling through filthy, rotten magazines. You can't do it. I, we can't fight it.

And, parent, you need to set an example. You say, "Well, I never let mine go. I take them." God help you if you do that. You say, "Well, I don't know what he does." That's worst of all. You better know, because that little life is a stewardship from God, and Jesus gave you that little life; and if you're allowing that thing to be pumped up with garbage, you're going to be an accountable person for that. I mean forty-five out of fifty-four junior high kids have been to an R movie? Shocking. You say, "Well, I can't help it what my child does." Oh, you better; and you better never go to one of those things. You better never go to one of those supposedly good ones where there's profanity. All that does is just keep lowering, it just attacks the standard, attacks the standard, attacks the standard, attacks; and the same thing with the music. It just keeps attacking it and attacking it until, finally, our rigid commitment to purity is broken down; and it's all subliminally happening. I won't expose myself to that, because I want to hold God's view of things, not the world's.

And there's a sense in which you got to isolate yourself. You say, "Well, I mean you're, you don't know what's going on." That's right, and I don't care. I have a good idea what's going on. I've never been to an R-rated movie, and I don't ever intend to go to one, and I'm not interested ever to go to a PG movie or anything else. I mean, for me, it's either Little Bo Peep or forget the whole thing, you know? I've no interest in exposing my mind to the garbage of the world. Why would I do that? Grieves my heart to think that little kids…I mean that does not, that does not help a child. That does not help an adolescent. That doesn't help a teenage kid trying to deal with all the struggles of life and developing sexual ideas and identity, to expose them to that kind of stuff.

And I'm not talking about some legalism, folks. I'm talking about sin, just plain ugly sin. I mean what, what worse thing could the world do than parade in front of young eyes filth, and they've got, they're at it right now. They're at it every way they can. This is a time, beloved, for disciplined living. This is a time for disciplined living. This is a time to stop being a victim, stop being diverted off course by the sirens that are screaming, "Come over here. Come over here. We'll make you happy. We'll give you pleasure." No place for it. And I'll tell you something. If you go to those things, then I don't care how often you're in church; you have not yet given your life fully to the commitment that God calls for. You haven't. At that moment, you've abandoned yourself from the disciplined path of obedience; and if you're rejecting this in your little mind that shows me or you that you are in the battle, and you're losing. You're losing. And it isn't even a question of how bad it is, because we're supposed to think, not on things that aren't bad, but on things that are what? That are good.

Well, let me take you to a second attitude that I want to talk about this morning. This is the attitude of accountability. Accountability: And I just want to, I just want to go back to the basics again on this one. It is necessary that we teach the church that it has to exist in accountability. In other words, we're all accountable for each other. That most of all, we ought to be concerned about each other, not what color the carpet is or the wallpaper or, or not how this little program goes or that little program goes or whether we like this or that. We're to be concerned about each other. Go to Matthew 7 for a moment. Let me see if I can't refresh your mind about what accountability refers to. In, in Matthew 7, I want to just mention two verses, verses 3 and 4. Says: "And why beholdest thou the mote or the splinter – toothpick, if you will – that's in thy brother's eye." You're concerned about this, this toothpick in your brother's eye. What does that refer to? Well, it refers to some sin, some failure, some something wrong; and you should be concerned. But it says why are you concerned about that, but not concerned about the eight-by-eight beam in your own eye? Verse 4: "Or how will you say to thy brother, 'Let me pull the toothpick out of your eye,' and behold an eight-by-eight is in your own eye?" I mean it's, it's, it's hyperbole here. It's a *ridiculo*—if it was a cartoon, we'd laugh. It's silly. But what he's saying is, "Look, how can you do what you need to do for your brother if you haven't got your own life together?"

Now what this points up to us is very important. We have a responsibility to each other to take care of those things that are in each other's eye. We have a responsibility to deal with sin in each other; but before we can do that, we have to do what? Deal with our own. Now, I believe accountability in the church is a very important thing. I believe we're all accountable for each other. But before I can be accountable for you, I got to get my own act together; and accountability, then, has a reverse effect. When I realize my responsibility is to care for you, then I'm going to have to make sure I'm okay. Now, let me put it into practical terms. You know somebody who doesn't come to church anymore. Think about it long enough and you probably do. You know somebody who came for a while, doesn't come anymore. You have a responsibility to go to that person and say, "Look, you're forsaking the assembly. You need to be with God's people. You need to be less committed to making money, the curse of laying up treasure on earth, and more committed to being with God's people." You say, "Well, who am I to do that? I got problems in my own life." That's the point. Get your own life cleaned up, and get the beam out of your eye. Then go do that. That's why I say accountability's a self-purifying reality, see. As I become concerned about other people, I by, by by-product, have to be concerned about myself because I can't deal with you till I've dealt with me.

Galatians 6 says, "Look, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, ye that are [What?] spiritual; restore him." So if he's in a state of disobedience, it's going to take one who's walking in obedience to help. So before you can help him, you're going to help yourself. So as long as people get into accountability relationships, it has a self-purifying effect. You show me a church where people are not taught to care about others falling into sin, where they're not taught to restore others, and I'll show you a church where people are also not exposed as to their own sin, and they can hide it and cover it much easier. There must be accountability; and when I'm accountable for you, I'm accountable for me, so very, very important, necessary.

Now let's go to Matthew 18 and see how this works out. If I've taken care of the eight-by-eight in my own eye, what am I going to do about you, and when you fall into sin? All right, verse 15 of Matthew 18; you remember we studied it some months ago. Says, "If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." So if he sins, you go to him. That's the way to do it. A church has to have that kind of accountability. I mean if you know somebody, for example, who has got a business, and you know they're not doing right, they're not treating employees right, they're not treating their partners right, they're being dishonest in their business; you have an obligation before God as His child to go to that person who's a Christian and to say, "You are in sin." And you do it lovingly, but you have respon—You say, "I can't do that. I got my own"— Then get your own problems straightened out. You say, "Well, that'll take a long time." No, it's only as long as a prayer of confession. And with a pure heart and a loving spirit, you go to that individual and confront that sin. If you know somebody that's not being right and true to their partner in marriage or parents that aren't being faithful to their children to do as they ought, or children that are not doing what they should to their parents, if you know someone who's out of line in any way in the church, it's your responsibility in love to go to that person; and, you see, that's a self-purifying thing.

What it does is it purifies me before I can go. Secondly, if we all begin to do that, then everybody is looking at his own life and saying, "Boy, I want to be sure my life is right." Church really must have accountability. Must. It doesn't matter who you are. I mean in Galatians, chapter 2, Paul went to Peter and "withstood him to the face [it says in verses 11 to 14] because he was to be blamed," and he nailed him in public. Really, I say in public, because it's in the Bible and everybody knew. Nobody's exempt; but elders or those who are really high are rebuked before all that others may fear. I mean, I received a letter this week, someone who called to my attention a failure in my own life, an irresponsible act in my own life, and something that I should've done and did not do, and brought it to my attention. And I wrote them back and asked their forgiveness and thanked them for bringing it to my attention. I, see, I want to know that as much as you want to know that; but if you don't tell me that, then you don't help me, because I keep making the same mistakes again. I keep falling into the same trap again until you confront me with that. The church must have that kind of accountability; and I'm talking about accountability on this level where it really matters, on the level of life purity.

Husband, you need to hold your wife accountable. Wife, you need to hold your husband accountable. It isn't right for you to tolerate their sinfulness. Lovingly, they should be confronted, lovingly; and so you go, "What if they don't listen?" Well, verse 16 says take two people with you, one or two people. And if they still don't, tell the whole church; and what happens when you tell the whole church? The whole church goes after them. Last communion, we mentioned three names of people who have fallen into sin, and we told the whole church. I wonder how many of us have gone or written a card or a letter, maybe called the church office to get an address so that we could send them a word from the Lord's Word to encourage them to come out of that sin. That's our responsibility, accountability; and it keeps the church pure. It's a self-purifying thing.

I remember when we first were committed to doing this when we came to Grace Church, and a couple of pastors said to me, "You'll wreck the place, MacArthur." This is my first pastorate, right, and they said, "You don't know what you're doing. You can't go into a church and do that—have everybody looking around for everybody else's sin, can't do that. You'll wreck it." I said, "Well, we'll do it, because the Bible says. Then we'll let God decide what happens to it." My job is not to try to build the church. Christ said He'd build the church. I'm not going to compete with Him. That's not my job. My job is to try to do all I can to make sure the people in the church understand what the Word of God says and live it out. Then we'll see where God takes the church. And early in those years, I had a wonderful illustration. A wife called me. She said, "My husband just left. He went to shack up with another lady."

I said, "Do you know the lady's name?"

"Yeah, she's—he's over there. He's going to live with her now. He's left his home and kids."

I said, "What's her name?" She told me the name, so I went to the phone book, looked up the name, and got the phone number, called, and he answered the phone. And I said, "This is John at the church," and it was a shock; I mean a real jolt. And I said, I told him I was calling, you know, in the name of Christ, calling him to obedience. To get out of that place before he sinned a sin against the Lord and his wife and his church and go home; and a little while later, and he said he would. And his wife called me and said he was there; and the next Sunday when he saw me, he embraced me and said, "Thanks, I didn't want to be there. I was tempted. I didn't think anybody cared." See, it didn't alienate him at all. Pulled him right in, because that's what we need.

You see, for a Christian, that isn't what we want to do. That's what we don't want to do, right? "The things I want to do," Paul says, "I don't do. Things I don't want to do, I do." It's the flesh. So accountability is not invading someone's private personality. It's helping them in their battle with their own sinfulness. See? That's what we ought to be concerned about: accountability. That's why we come to the Lord's Table, you know, to get our lives right, get the boards out of our own eyes, so we could help other people, so we can restore each other in love, so we can provoke one another to love and good works. It comes down to the one *anothers* of the Scripture. I mean are you exhorting one another, rebuking one another, reproving one another, praying for one another, loving one another, teaching one another, edifying, admonishing? All those one *anothers*; *t*hey're all over the place. Praying for one another; that's the life of the church. That's, that's the flow-through stuff, see.

One final, very brief: You can't deal with this one without the next, and that's forgiveness. The church cannot survive unless there is forgiveness. That's another necessary attitude, because we are, we're human; and we, we fail. I mean that's the way it is. I do and everybody else does, and we, we're going to fail. But if you can't forgive and you can't forgive particularly the one who fails you or who sins against you, then you've got a cancer in you, and there's a cancer in the body of Christ. In Matthew, go back to 6 for a moment and I will refresh you on the disciples' prayer. Verse 12: "And forgive us our debts," and every sin committed is a debt owed to God which could only be paid by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In other words, You forgive us as we forgive others. If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In other words, if you don't forgive, He won't. Now, this is not talking about redemptive, eternal forgiveness. This is talking about parental, temporal forgiveness. Redemptive, eternal forgiveness is ours in Christ; but that parental, temporal, for here and now kind of forgiveness that keeps the clear lines of fellowship open, and pure, and blessed, comes to us only if we forgive others. So if you don't forgive somebody, I don't care what they did to you, if you don't forgive them, then you have a cancer in you. I believe that an unforgiving heart is the reason for an awful lot of tragedy. In fact, I think the body catches the soul's diseases; and that there, there are many people who may be dead, and may

be dead, actually, of real cancer because they had such an unforgiving spirit. I'm not acting or talking clinically. I just know that the body catches the diseases of the mind, and guilt is the severest of all diseases; and an unforgiving heart creates bitter, bitter, bitter feelings, and also guilt, as well.

So if you will be forgiven on a daily basis by the Lord to know the clear and sweet and pure fellowship that He wants us to have in this life, it'll be because you forgive others also. And, my goodness, who are you not to forgive, right? Who are you not to forgive? You remember the parable in Matthew 18 of the man who owed ten thousand talents, and he came and said, "I don't have it. I don't anything to pay," and the man said, "I forgive you everything." And then he went out and found a guy who owed him eighteen bucks and strangled him and threw him in jail and said, "Stay there till you pay me." And the Lord was saying, "Who are you, who have been forgiven an inestimable, *unpayable* debt; and you won't forgive somebody else eighteen bucks?"

It's Ephesians 4:32. "Be...kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Listen, we ought to forgive, because we've been forgiven. We've been forgiven so much, we can forgive so little? Oh, the church needs to be filled with forgiving people, because we're going to fail, folks. We really are. I mean I'm going to do things that might irritate folks; and folks are going to do irri—things that irritate each other. You're going to have a problem, maybe, with somebody in the church or something. But if you can forgive, you're free from that. You're free from the bondage of that bitterness, and you're free to be forgiven and know the blessing of God. But if you harbor an unforgiving heart, you have bitterness. Who needs that? Forgiveness, such a beautiful thing.

So self-discipline in my life, accountability for others, and, when they do sin, I want to be there to lift them up, and I also want to forgive them, even if they've sinned against me. Even against me. And where you have a church that doesn't forgive, you have terrible problems, terrible problems. By the way, only humble people forgive, remember that? Only humble people who are not so proud as to say, "Boy, you did that to me. Nobody does that to me." But who get down and say, "Hey, you're more important than I am, anyway and I want to love you in the love of forgiveness." Well, there's more for next time. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for what we've learned about the attitudes You want in Your church: obedience, humility, love, unity, service, joy, peace, thankfulness, self-discipline, accountability, forgiveness. Beautiful things; may this church be marked by those things. It's such a wonderful place, such wonderful people. We see these things in them. Thank You, Lord, for the sweet forgiveness that we've all enjoyed in this fellowship, for the wonderful accountability that is carried out so wonderfully, and the self-discipline we see in so many lives. Thank You, Father, for their modeling and their example, their pattern. But, Father, just remind us of these things and the need to continue to be faithful. And for those who maybe have, have seen the whole thing as kind of a spectator sport—you buy a ticket, you watch what happens—Lord, move them away from that. May they know that it's

attitudes that you desire, right attitudes, flowing through the fellowship. And may the Spirit of God be released to accomplish all the holy purpose of the Savior for His redeemed people, so that none of us may exist on the fringe but in the mainstream as you build Your church for Your glory.

Please, just for a moment, keep your head bowed before we close; and let me just say that this would be a great time for all of us to make a prayer of real commitment to the Lord, a time to say: "Father, I desire to be self-disciplined. I covenant with You this moment to be obedient; to think on things pure; to walk the narrow path; and out of a self-disciplined and pure life, to step into the arena of accountability and minister and be ministered to; to be a forgiver. Can you covenant that with God in your heart?

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