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

The Pattern of Sanctification: Repentance
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:20-21
Code: 47-90

Well, may I invite you to turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 12...2 Corinthians chapter 12. We have come to the end of this epistle and are considering the last section of this great letter which we've entitled "The Faithful Pastor's Concerns....The Faithful Pastor's Concerns."

If I were to sum up what concerns a pastor, or what concerns a church leader, what concerns an elder in one word I would sum it up as the word "edification," upbuilding. Or to use two words, the building up of the saints. We are given to the church for its upbuilding.

Notice at the end of verse 19, chapter 12 verse 19, Paul says, "All for your upbuilding, beloved." And then over in chapter 13 verse 10 where the section ends, the end of that verse, "For building up and not for tearing down." So in 12:19 and 13:10 he speaks of his commitment to building up the church, and in between those two verses is the final section on how that is done. This is a very, very instructive portion of Scripture. It is at the end of the epistle, that doesn't lessen its important...importance, in fact if anything it heightens it. He has reached a kind of crescendo here and he gives us a summary of what is involved in the building up of the saints which is the passion of his life. Back in chapter 10 and verse 8 he said the same thing. The Lord had called him "For building you up and not for destroying you," chapter 10 verse 8.

Most notably in Ephesians chapter 4, Paul outlines what this involves. Ephesians 4:11 speaks of the Lord who gave some as Apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists and some as pastor/teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors have as their responsibility therefore the building up of the body of Christ. What does that mean? Well verse 13, "Till we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

Building up the church then means maturing the church, strengthening the church so that they become more like Christ, until they attain to the mature man the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. The goal then that we have the broad goal of the pastor in the church is the maturing of the saints, bringing them to Christ's likeness, to the measure of the stature

which belongs to Christ, conforming them more and more to the image of Jesus Christ, until they grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ. Now that we know. That is a very, very foundational and basic truth.

In our passage, and you can return to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, in our passage today Paul will outline for us the first step in accomplishing this objective. And as we move through this section in the next several weeks, more and more of its richness will unfold. The Apostle Paul did everything he did for the edification of the church. Everything he wrote in this letter was for their upbuilding, to strengthen them spiritually, to mature them spiritually, to increase their progressive sanctification, to shape them more into the image of Jesus Christ. Now any true pastor, any true servant of God, any true apostle is consumed with this, the spiritual maturing of his people. That's what we're called to see happen. That's what we're called to do. That's what Paul desired. That was his passion, that was his concern and that is the concern of any faithful pastor, the sanctification of his people...the edification, the building up, the purifying, the maturing, the nurturing, the growing of God's church more and more into the likeness of Christ, reaching the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now, because of that there are certain tasks that we must be committed to which contribute directly to that sanctification process. And Paul outlines those in this section. We're going to find six things that he must focus on, six features of ministry, six emphases and he's going to unfold them for us through these verses. If you are concerned for the sanctification of the church, which you must be because that's what you're called to do, if you've been given for the upbuilding of the saints and you're committed to that, there are six things you must be consumed with. One is repentance; two is discipline; three is authority; four is authenticity; five is obedience; and six is perfection...and those are the six features that Paul works through down to verse 10 of chapter 13. The pastor is concerned that his people become like Christ.

Paul the Apostle was concerned that his people became like Christ. And it was that concern that literally consumed his heart and his mind. It moved his emotions and it moved his will. His concern for them had very little to do with their physical well being, it had very little to do with their health, very little to do with their wealth or prosperity, very little, if anything, to do with their success, very little to do with their comfort, very little to do with their personal satisfaction or the fulfillment of their desires and goals, that was not an issue for Paul. The faithful pastor's concern was for the sanctification of his people. He was concerned for their spiritual well-being.

And I daresay it is fairly common that most churches and most Christians in them become preoccupied with the physical concerns of the church and much less preoccupied, if at all, with those which have to do with personal sanctification. We're very troubled when someone has a serious illness. We are very troubled when someone falls into severe economic straits. We are very troubled when a child dies in a family and we go there and we understand the sorrow and the pain and the loss and we rally to pray on behalf of that individual and that family that is most deeply wounded by

the loss. We struggle when a marriage breaks up or when a partner leaves because of the loneliness of that individual and perhaps we even do everything we can to find a new partner, if that indeed by God's allowance there's a possibility of remarriage. We're concerned when people have automobile accidents and are maimed. We're concerned when parents lose a young person a car crash and all of that. And rightly so. But it tends to be that we get consumed by these sort of physical concerns and there's little space in our emotions and in our mind to be occupied with the deep concern for the spiritual issues of the church.

Well the true pastor is consumed with those matters. Of course he's concerned to be a part of times of suffering and times of pain and times of illness and times of loss and times of difficulty in the matters of physical life, but only insofar really as they touch the spiritual dimension because that's where the real concern lies. In fact, we ought to count it all joy when we fall into most trials because they have a perfecting work spiritually. So sometimes we have to tell you the pastor is cheering on the pain because of its remedial effects spiritually. But what does concern and must concern the faithful pastor is the spiritual well-being of his people. And at the beginning of Paul's discussion here, he deals with the first matter on his list and the matter is the matter of repentance.

A faithful pastor is, first of all, concerned for the repentance of his people. This is where the whole concern of building up, nurturing, sanctifying the congregation has to start. Sin must be being dealt with. Notice verse 20. "For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish, that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. I'm afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced."

You know, I really believe that churches today and pastors today and elders today need to be held accountable for faithfulness to the matters that are in this text. They need to be held accountable for the matter of repentance, discipline, authority, authenticity, obedience and perfection. That is how they will be held accountable before God and they need to be held accountable even today by others. And most notably at the very head of this list is to be concerned about the issue of repentance. We're accountable to God, I believe, for that concern. Paul was concerned about his people in regard to sin. Why? Because it is sin that is the enemy of spiritual progress. Sin is that which thwarts edification. The building up of the saints is hindered by sin. Becoming like Jesus Christ, that process is retarded severely by sin. Sin is anything that displeases God and anything that displeases God does not contribute to the process of sanctification to which all of us are called. So sin then becomes of supreme importance to the shepherd of the sheep, to the pastor. He is concerned about sin in the life of his congregation, just as a parent should be primarily beyond everything else concerned about sin in the life of his child.

Now look at Paul's concern, verse 20. "For I am afraid..." He says the same thing at the beginning of verse 21, "I am afraid." What is he saying here? He has some fears, the word is *phobeo* from which we get the English word phobia. It's...it's not talking about a superficial thing, it's talking about a deep-seated fear, a deep-seated anxiety, something that has a way of wracking his content. He says, "I have a phobia, if you will, I have a deep-seated anxiety, I have a deep-seated misgiving. I am afraid that perhaps when I come," he says that in both verses and he's referring to his planned third visit. Back in verse 15 he said, "Here for the third time I'm ready to come to you." In chapter 13 verse 1, "This is the third time I'm coming to you." He had been there once to found the church. He had been there a second time to confront some sin and what was known as the sorrowful visit referred to in chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. And now he's about to go back the third time but he's afraid. Frankly, the second time he went was agonizing, absolutely agonizing because when he got there he found rebellion, he found sin. And he says in chapter 2 verse 1, "I determined this for my own sake that I would not come to you in sorrow again." I just don't have the heart for it, I just can't deal with it again. I don't want to come there and see what I saw the first time and have to deal with all the sorrow that came about as a result of it. I don't want to come in affliction and anguish of heart and tears, as he referred to in chapter 2 verse 4. I don't want that again. But he's planning to come but he's afraid that when he comes it's going to be like the last time he came when he was so heart broken, when he confronted their sin and they rejected him and he left with a broken heart.

Now you notice here that he's somewhat restrained. He says, "Perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish...perhaps." He's not ready to make a complete denunciation of the Corinthians. He is restrained. He will not pass final judgment on them until he sees for himself the real evidence when he gets there. That's why in chapter 13 verse 1 he says, "This is the third time I'm coming to you and every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses." In other words, we're not going to take any assumptions. When I get there we're going to have a real tribunal and we're going to find out what condition you're in spiritually. He was very concerned that he would go there and face the heartbreaking reality of carnality in the church. This would be the very opposite of what God wanted. This would be the very opposite of what he wanted. He wanted their edification. End of verse 19, "Everything was for your upbuilding, beloved, everything. Everything is for your spiritual good, for your sanctification. And I don't want to come there and find unrepented sin."

Such a fear, by the way, was reasonable because the last time he went he found that. It was reasonable because since that last time false teachers had gained the ascendency and many of the Corinthians had followed their lies and you don't follow error without attendant sin. Iniquity follows error, theological error is followed by behavioral iniquity. So he realizes that there is great potential for sin to be in that church because they have false teachers there who were leading them astray. And he's afraid that when he goes there he's going to find that is present, sin and no repentance, as he notes in verse 21.

Now remember, he had written them a severe letter after his sorrowful visit and he called them to repent of following the false teachers and repent of the attendant sin. And that letter was delivered by Titus and Titus had come back to him before he wrote 2 Corinthians and said they did repent, they reaffirmed their love to you, Paul. That's in chapter 7 and it's very hopeful he says in verse 6 that Titus finally came and he reported to us, verse 7, your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me so that I rejoiced. He was happy that they had indeed repented and verse 9 he says, "I now rejoice not that you were made sorrowful by my letter but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance. You repented and your repentance was without regret," verse 10, "and it was a godly sorrow, and an earnestness," verse 11. So there was definitely a repentant group in that church, maybe the majority and they repented at that letter taken by Titus.

But sin and error die hard and the false teachers were still there and there was certainly still a minority that hadn't yet repented. And so Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to kill all the remaining noxious weeds that were still in the soil of the Corinthian church, those who were still unrepentant, still continuing in sin.

The bottom line here though for you to understand is that nothing is more painful to the pastor than sin in his beloved church. It just crushed him. Back in chapter 11 verse 28 he talked about the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. What was that? Verse 29, "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" The pastor is concerned about the spiritual weakness and sin of his people. That's what is consuming the heart of Paul. That's my fear. My fear is that I'm going to get there and that's what I'm going to run into. And my fear is, first of all, when I come, verse 20, I may find you to be not what I wish. I'm doing to come there and you're not going to be what I wish. You're not going to be growing in Christ, growing in grace, repenting of sin, moving ahead, becoming more like Christ. But rather the very opposite, I'm going to find carnality, and iniquity, and a lack of repentance and if I find you to be not what I wish, then I may be found by you to be not what you wish. If I don't find you the way I want to find you, then you're not going to find me the way you want to find me.

You say, "What does he mean by that?" Well if you go back to 1 Corinthians 4:21 he said to them he was going to come to them in this first letter and he says in verse 21, "What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod?" That's an instrument of chastening, discipline. "Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness? What's your desire? Take your choice. It's up to you. Deal with your sin and I'll come to you with love and gentleness. Don't deal with sin and I'll come with a rod." That's what he means in verse 20. If I find you to be not what I wish, you're going to find me not what you wish.

And what does he fear might be there? Sins that destroy the unity of the church. Sins that destroy the unity of the church. "Perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances." All of those sins, folks, strike at the unity of the church. That's part of his

commission. You remember the text I read you in Ephesians chapter 4? "For the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith." The church is to be one. The Lord wants a church of people who are looking on each other and not on their own things, considering others better than themselves, serving and ministering to one another where there's harmony and love. And Paul is saying I'm afraid I'm going to come and find sins that destroy the unity of the church. And he gives a typical list of the kinds of sins that do that.

Paul is good at lists. He's involved in giving lists many times in his letters, lists of sins such as 1 Corinthians 6, Galatians 5. But here is a little list that has to do with what disrupts the unity of the church. And these are the kinds of iniquities he fears could exist. Now why would he fear this? Because they were part of pagan culture. They were part of pre-Christian Corinthian experience. The very sins listed in verse 20 were typical of pagan behavior in Corinthian society. And they had already been carried into the church by the Corinthians when they were converted and they had already been...they had already been acting out these sins in the church. You say, "You mean those very sins were already a part of the church?" Absolutely. In fact you will find every single one of those sins addressed in 1 Corinthians. In Paul's letter he addresses every one of those sins and says to the Corinthians, "You've got to stop doing that." I mean, their culture was that way. It was argumentative. It was a culture of debate. And the people picked their people and their leaders and they were always embroiled with each other. It was a selfish culture. It was an arrogant society. There were all kinds of tumults and upheavals and anger and disputes and slanders and gossips. That was a way of life, as it is today and they dragged it right into the church and Paul had to confront it all.

Strife, for example, he already spoke to them about in 1 Corinthians 1:11, it means rivalry, discord, debates, literally battles. And then the word jealousies, *zelos*, envyings. He confronted that in 1 Corinthians 3:3. And then angry tempers, *thumos*, outbursts is the word, fits, sudden explosions of anger, out-of-control hostility. He addressed that in 1 Corinthians 6:1 and following. And then disputes, *erithia*, factious attitudes, divisiveness, partisanship. He addressed that in 1 Corinthians 1:11.

And then slanders which is open loud-mouthed criticism, public insults, public vilification. He spoke of that in 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:10. And by the way, that's an onomatopoetic word, *katalalia*, katalalala, gossip is another word used here and that too he had to address in an indirect way in 1 Corinthians 11:18. Gossip is quiet whispers of criticism. That's a word in the Greek that's even hard to pronounce, *psithurismos*. It's like psstpsstpsstpsst, another onomatopoetic word, whispers of criticism. Arrogance, that's another word that...that is sort of onomatopoetic, starts out with a p-h-u, whew...hot air, puffed up, overblown. He referred to that in 1 Corinthians 4 and 5 and 8. And then he closes with disturbances, disorder, tumults, anarchy. They may have been trying to exercise congregational rule where everybody does what's right in his own eyes. And 1 Corinthians 11:20 and following, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and following deal with that. Every one of these sins had been dealt

with in 1 Corinthians and were a part of pagan culture. They got dragged into the church and Paul's afraid he's going to come there and find they've all sort of come back again because if people are following error, they inevitably are going to follow sinful behavior. And these are the things he fears he'll find. Familiar sins, they were a part of the habit patterns of these people before they came to Christ. They had even been dragged into the church. And some of them even showed up at the communion table, you will remember, according to 1 Corinthians 11. And they could have risen their ugly head again under the destructive influence of the false teachers. And Paul is afraid he's going to find that stuff when he gets back into the church. Those sins that destroy the unity of the church.

Then in verse 21 he's afraid he's going to find those sins that destroy the purity of the church. He says, "I'm afraid I'm going to come again and what I'm going to find, look at the end of verse 21, I'm going to find impurity, immorality, sensuality which they have practiced. These are the sins that destroy the purity of the church.

Now these sins were really very dominant features of social life in Corinth. In fact, they were a way of life in Corinth, just like they are today in our society. Immorality was rampant. The first word is the word impurity, *akatharsia*. You've heard of the word a catharsis, a catharsis is a word for cleansing. When somebody says you had a cathartic experience or you went through a catharsis, that means you had a cleansing. *A* is the alpha-privative which negates a word, *akatharsia* means unclean. And the word unclean, or impure, is a general word used for sexually wicked living. When you couldn't specify anything, it was just general sexual uncleanness. The second word is immorality, that's the Greek word *porneia* from which we get the word pornography and it basically is easily defined. It is the word fornication and I know that is a word that needs definition, and the word fornication has as its most clear synonym prostitution...prostitution. Any act outside of marriage, any sexual act outside of marriage is fornication and/or prostitution. You prostitute yourself when you engage in a sexual act outside marriage. So that is the word prostitution.

And then there's the word sensuality, *aselgeia*, which is a word that basically is used to described unrestrained sexual sin that is blatant and publicly indecent. This is flagrant publicly indecent blatant sin without restraint in the sexual realm. Paul says, "I'm afraid I'm going to come to the church and find this, I'm going to find sins that destroy the unity of the church and then I'm going to find sins that destroy the purity of the church. This is what I'm afraid of."

To go to bed with a Greek prostitute in the Greek language is the verb "Corinthianize." Prostitutes were so common in the city of Corinth, there were street walker prostitutes in the secular society of Corinth, and there were religious prostitutes in all the temples because when you engaged a temple prostitute you somehow, they believed, you communed with the deity through that act, it was an act of worship. Prostitution, fornication, impurity, sensuality dominated that society. That sin died very hard. And now remember, Paul addressed that kind of activity in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 in his first letter in no uncertain terms, talked about a man who was having an affair with his father's wife and went on to

talk about how that kind of leaven leavens the whole lump and what a disastrous effect it has on the church. And then he went in to chapter 6 and talked about the terrible idea that a believer would join himself to a prostitute and therefore join Christ with whom he is one to that prostitute. And then he goes in to chapter 7 and talks about marriage and how marriage is to be sacred and how people are to conduct themselves and avoid fornication. So 5, 6 and 7 of 1 Corinthians addressed the same issues. And Paul is concerned that as these people have fallen victim to the false teachers and as they have drifted, they're going to fall back into these same old patterns of sin.

Now verse 21 tells us a little bit about what may have been the character of this situation. He says, "I'm concerned about many of those who have sinned in the past." Now "who have sinned in the past" is a verb, one verb, *proharmartano*, *harmartano* is the verb "to sin," *pro* means "to sin before," it means "to sin previously." It's in the perfect tense which means they started it in the past and they're still doing it. I...I...he says, "I'm concerned about those who sinned in the past (implied) and it's continued on and they have not repented...unrepented, continued sexual sin. It began in the past, continued persistently into the present, and perhaps still going on even as he wrote and would still be going on when he arrived. He says at the end of verse 21, "It's something which they have practiced." In other words, it's become a pattern. It's how they live. It's an ongoing pattern of sin without repentance that began in the past and continues.

That's very important to understand. That's what concerns the pastor. You don't expect there to be sinlessness in the congregation, you don't expect people never to sin. What you do expect and what you cry out for, and pray for, and preach for is that if they do sin they...what? They repent. That's the issue. If they sin, Galatians 6, "If your brother's overtaken in a fault, you go to him, you restore him in love considering yourself lest you also be tempted." The church ought to be the safest place in the world to sin because if you sin you're immediately confronted in love and gentleness and brought back to righteousness and blessing. That's why it's so dangerous to sin so repeatedly and get put out of the church because now you have no one caring for your spiritual condition. You're not under those gracious influences. The church is the safest place to sin because you're immediately called to repentance under the preaching of the Word of God, under the influences of the Spirit of God both in your own life and the lives of those around you. God doesn't expect perfection. He does expect and desire repentance. But Paul is concerned about people who've got a pattern of sin, a practice of sin and they just don't repent. They just keep it up without repentance. That's what breaks his heart.

Well, the call then is for repentance. And any pastor worth his...worth the title and the responsibility must start his concern for the sanctification of God's people at that point. I'm concerned, Paul says, about sin in your life. Oh I'm concerned about your economics and I'm concerned about your career and I'm concerned about the disappointments in life and I'm concerned about the physical problems that you have and those are matter for prayer and concern, but those aren't nearly so concerning to me as your spiritual condition because the worst that can happen to you physically is you die and that's the best that can happen to you because then you leave the sinful world behind. Far better to

depart and be with Christ, right? But what does concern me is sin in your life because then you forfeit the blessing of God in this life, you forfeit eternal reward in the life to come and you lose your usefulness and fruitfulness and effectiveness both in the lives of believers and unbelievers who need to hear from you and see through you the power of the gospel. I'm much more concerned about the spiritual dimension.

You can't ever be concerned that you have a large crowd, that's insufficient. You can't be concerned that they liked the sermon, you can't even be concerned that they got it which is nice when that happens, that it was clear and understandable and they got the message. The thing that has to be the bleeding passion of your heart is the personal holiness of the people. And I confess that the hardest thing to hear is when I hear about some pattern of unrepented sin that's been uncovered in the life of a believer or revealed in the life of a believer. That is just wrenching.

And Paul had an experience that I think you'll understand. Verse 21, he says when this happens two things take place, two things, it effects me two ways. First, verse 21, "I'm afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you." It brings on me shame...it brings on me shame, it brings me low, *tapeinoo*, it means to be brought low. You know, he's saying I just...my credibility is at stake here, the authenticity of my apostleship is at stake. You are my epistle, he said, known and read of all men, right? You...if somebody wants to know whether I'm a true apostle of Jesus Christ, if somebody wants a valid affirmation of my ministry, they look at you. And if you're just engulfed in sins that destroy the unity and the purity of the church, then-then I'm dishonored, then my critics are justified, then those who would attack my authenticity have reason to attack it. You've pulled my name down.

Now it wasn't that Paul hadn't learned that humbling was good. Back in chapter 12 verse 7, you know, he said that because of the greatness of the visions that he had had and the revelations, the Lord had to put a thorn in his flesh, a messenger from Satan to buffet him to keep him from exalting himself. The Lord was humbling Paul in some very, very difficult ways. Being humbled is one thing, being humiliated is something else. I don't want to be humiliated with people saying, "Oh yeah, you know that Corinthian church, that church full of impure corrupt contentious fighting, wrangling people, that church was pastored for two years by the Apostle Paul." It would humiliate him and cast further doubt on the authenticity of his apostleship and give more fuel to his enemies. It's humiliating.

I can understand when a pastor does everything he can do in a church situation and what he gets back is sin. I can understand that he gets brokenhearted. I can understand that it's more than he can handle. I can understand that you reach a point of shame where you really don't want to be associated with it, it's heartbreaking, it's crushing and you might leave. Nothing is more distressing, nothing is more discouraging, nothing more disheartening, nothing takes away your joy and sort of saps your strength more than a failure at the very place of your greatest effort and your great...and you're making a great effort for the sanctification of your people and there's a monumental failure at that point, you begin to question the validity of what you do, question your own ministry and your

without honor.

But there's a second part of it. Not only did Paul fear suffering shame, but sadness. Verse 21, "And...he says in the middle of the verse...I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past." Not only will I have to suffer shame, but sadness. The word mourn here, *pentheo* in the Greek, means to grieve. It's that inward aching, it's that deep-seated trouble, grieving down deep. It's just grievous. You find your congregation in a sinful condition, and it's a dishonor to you because you've been there, or you've been the shepherd, you've been the leader, you've been the pastor and it's also a source of deep sadness. I can understand when a man leaves a church under conditions like this. I can understand when a pastor reaches the point where he just has lost heart. Paul was depressed over the Corinthians, as he says in chapter 7. In chapter 2 he said he didn't have enough strength to even minister to an open opportunity in Troas because he was so heart sick about the mess in Corinth.

I can understand when a pastor packs up and says, "You know, the shame is too great and the sadness is too great because the sin is too great." Anything short of that you better reexamine your motives. It may be that you're leaving because you're looking for greener pasture or because the challenge is too hard or because the place isn't exactly the way you would like it, or because they're not treating you the way you'd like to be treated. But I think if you do leave and you...and we can honestly say there might be justification for it, it's when you've reached the point where the sins of your people have so shamed and saddened you that you just have nothing left. They have...they have continued to strike blows at the unity of the church and the purity of the church and against the truth that they have heard. It wasn't that Paul hadn't taught them the truth, he had. He had taught them the truth. I can understand a man losing heart in a situation like that because the concern we have is for repentance. It's...it's not for perfection in the sense that there's no sin. We want them to move more and more toward the perfection of Christ but we understand there's going to be sin in everybody's life. And all the Lord expects is repentance for that and that breaks the pattern of shame and sadness that comes into the heart of the preacher. We expect to have to deal with sin in our own lives and sin in the lives of the people. We rejoice when there's repentance.

In closing, turn to Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2, here is the Lord writing to the churches, seven churches. And as the Lord writes to the churches we get a picture of what concerns Him. He's writing to Ephesus in chapter 2 and He says, "I know your deeds," verse 2, "your toil and your perseverance and you're not tolerant of evil men and you test everybody who claims to be an apostle and you discern the false from the true and that's good. You have perseverance, you endured, you haven't grown weary." But He says, "I'm concerned about you because you left your first love." Well that is...that is a serious indictment. Then in verse 5, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen and do...what?...repent." Again even the Lord doesn't expect sinlessness in His church but He does call for repentance.

Down in verse 12 in the letter to the church at Pergamum and He writes to that church and affirms some who are faithful witnesses. But He says, "I'm concerned about you because you have some there...verse 14...who have the teaching of Balaam and you've put that teaching in there that taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, eat things sacrificed to idols, commit acts of immorality and you've also followed some of the teaching of another false group called the Nicolaitans." Verse 16, "Repent...repent."

What does that mean to repent? It means to consider the pattern of sin, turn around and go the other direction. Repent. Chapter 3 He writes to the church at Sardis, actually in the church at Thyatira in verse 21 He talks about giving time to repent to the church at Thyatira, but she doesn't want to repent. And then in chapter 3 verse 3, the church at Sardis that had a name that it was alive, and probably had a good crowd, just dead. And He says in verse 3, "Remember therefore what you have received and heard and keep it and repent." Repent...repent. Verse 19 to the church at Laodicea, "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline. Be zealous therefore and repent."

That's what God is asking for in His church, repentance, brokenness over sin, contrite heart, confession of sin, admission of sin and telling the Lord you desire to turn from it. That's Christ call to His church, that's Paul's call to his church, that's my call to you, that's every pastor's call. That's why I say, the faithful pastor is concerned for the sanctification of the church, the building up of the church and that starts with being concerned for the repentance of his people. That's my prayer for you that when sin crouches at your door and is successful in taking you captive to it, you will repent and the grace of God washing you clean continue on the path of sanctification.

Well, what happens if you don't repent? The faithful pastor is concerned secondly for the discipline of his people. That's for next time...the discipline of his people. Join me in prayer.

Father, this is an important and foundational word in the life of Your church and we bless You and praise You and thank You for it. And may we respond as we ought to respond to this truth. O God, may we be a pure church, may we repent of sins of impurity and sins of disunity, anything that divides the unity of the church, anything that pollutes the purity of the church, Lord, may we repent of it and walk in confession and righteousness. And may You make churches and pastors faithful to this priority and may they set aside the trivialities that occupy so many ministries and focus on these issues that really matter, knowing that righteousness not only honors God but exalts a people, brings blessing and that righteousness comes from the faithful clear teaching of the Word of God so that we are built up in the faith and are strong and have overcome the wicked one. Righteousness comes out of disciplined living according to the Word of God, and obedience. Righteousness comes out of faithful prayer, personal communion. Righteousness comes, Father, as we come together and strengthen one another with mutual ministry in love and encouragement, intercession. And when sin does come, may we immediately repent that Christ might be honored in our fellowship in our church.

We pray in His name. Amen.

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