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

**The Pattern of Sanctification, Part 1: Church Discipline**
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-2
Code: 47-91

The Pattern of Sanctification: Church Discipline

This morning we return to our study of 2 Corinthians. In fact, we come to the final chapter of 2 Corinthians and the text for this morning is the first two verses. For those of you who visit with us this morning, we are typically going through a book of the Scriptures. We have for several years now been working our way through 2 Corinthians, a great letter from the Apostle Paul to the Christian church in the city of Corinth. We have finally arrived at chapter 13 and we are near the end.

I want to read the first two verses which will be the setting for the message that is on my heart this morning. Paul writes in verse 1, "This is the third time I'm coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone."

This is a very straightforward statement from Paul. It is, in fact, a warning. The key is the last phrase in verse 2, "I will not spare anyone." Paul is pledging to come to Corinth and he is warning them that if he finds sin there he will deal with it firmly.

Now before we look at the text itself I want to kind of get us into the importance of this subject and the importance of the attitude of the Apostle Paul here by sharing with you a perspective that I think exists in the church today. Many people are concerned about the state of the church. The condition of churches today have caused myriad of seminars and conferences and books to be written. There are constant calls for renewal in the church, for better understanding of the culture, for changing the style of the church to fit the style of the nineties, replacing preaching of the Scripture with more interesting methodologies and technologies. All across our country, in fact all around the world there are these efforts being made to reinvent the church. The fear is that the church is not speaking to the time, people are not listening. The church has somehow become irrelevant, it has become obsolete. Self-styled experts are saying that the future of the church is in the balance and the church may not survive in the west if it doesn't become culturally relevant, if it doesn't learn how to package its message better, if it doesn't target felt needs, if it doesn't employ more popular and efficient communication devices than it currently uses.

All of this comes into focus in a new book that's just been out a couple of weeks, it's one of those books that you can pick up and read rather rapidly. I read it fairly rapidly. I couldn't put it down, it just kept compelling me to read. It was sort of like enjoying the pain, actually, it was like there's something redeeming in this self-flagellation that I'm going through and I'm going to carry it all the way to the end. The book pained me deeply, and every page added more to my pain. But I couldn't put it down because I was so startled about what the book was saying. It is a book that calls for the church to do what I just said, reinvent itself. And it says on the cover of the book, "Today's church is incapable of responding to the present moral crisis, it must reinvent itself or face virtual oblivion by mid twenty-first century," end quote.

So the book says that if the church doesn't reinvent itself and put itself in better cultural relevance, it's going to go out of existence in 50 years. That statement alone was overwhelming for me. You mean to tell me that the eternal God who determined in the councils of the trinity before the foundation of the world, before time began who He would redeem and how He would gather His own to Himself and bring them to eternal glory is somehow going to find His whole plan coming unglued in the next 50 years? You mean to tell me that the church which Jesus Christ purchased with His own blood is somehow going to escape His purposes for redemption and atonement? You mean to tell me that the church that Jesus said He would build and the gates of Hades could not prevail against it is somehow going to become victimized by its own ineptness? That is a brash and irresponsible statement to say that if the church doesn't reinvent itself it will face oblivion by the mid twenty-first century. The only thing that could possibly obliterate the church on earth by then would be the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ in the glorification of the church.

That's a very irresponsible thing to say and the author of the book fearing, and I think he probably genuinely fears that the church might go out of existence, suggests that there are some ways to save the church. And these are the suggestions. Develop cyber churches, virtual churches on the Internet. Secondly, develop house churches which appeal to people because they have low control, low authority and operate without historical tradition...I might add, or theology. Eliminate congregational churches like this for more congenial, less confrontational and more dispassionately interactive forums. Preachers must be replaced by presenters who have no notes and don't hide behind pulpits and who generate a more positive response for their listeners. We must get rid of sermons because one-sided communication is ineffective. And eliminate series and Bible exposition because everybody's attendance is sporadic and people really get irritated coming in and out of series that they can't consistently hear so we need to play to their sporadic attendance. And every sermon should be a unit in itself because most of the folks will miss the next two weeks before they decide to come back.

You say, "Well where did he get those ideas?" They were the result of a survey. If you ask unbelievers outside the church what they want, you can get answers like that. If you ask unbelievers inside the church what they want, you can get answers like that. If you ask believers in the church

ignorant of Scripture what they want, you can get answers like that. But if you were to survey biblically literate believers, you wouldn't get answers like that.

So who is it that determines the character of the church? You go to the lowest possible source, unbelievers outside the church, unbelievers inside the church, or ignorant believers in the church? What is the hope of the church? Is this really it? If we can just disband congregational churches and develop a virtual church on the Internet, will that solve our problem? Will that dramatically effect the church's ability to confront the moral crisis of our day, as if that somehow was our reason for existence, and it's not. Ours is not a moral agenda, ours is a spiritual one. Would it be better if we had presenters instead of preachers and we got rid of pulpits and got rid of sermon notes and sat on stools, would that be the difference? And just sort of told stories? Would it be better if instead of somebody preparing to preach a sermon and giving forth an exposition of Scripture we had a pooling of everyone's ideas? Would it be better if we never had any continuity in our sermons but had little units week in and week out? Would that really save the church from virtual oblivion? And by the way, are we the ones responsible to save the church from going out of existence? Is that our job?

That's all the result of a survey, you see. That's what people want and what they want is what they should get. That's...that's the basic thesis behind all of that. Now if you ask me what the church needs, I don't need a survey, I just ask the Lord of the church and He's revealed it in His Word. And what the church really needs is more consistent, faithful, clear, theological exposition of the mind of God through the pages of Scripture. What it needs is better preaching, better sermons and I may get in trouble for saying this, fewer small churches with ungifted, untrained, and unskilled preachers. The Word must dominate the church and bear its God-intended power and authority over all who hear.

You see, the only way that the church will ever effectively counter the crisis of our time, moral crisis, spiritual crisis, is when the Word of God is working powerfully in the church, listen to what I say, to produce not information but holiness. There's the operative word, folks. Write that down somewhere. That's the theme of the message this morning. You see, the hope of the church and the impact of the church is all connected to the purity of the church. Holiness is the issue. When Jesus first addressed the church in Matthew 18, the first time He ever said anything related to the church in that great sermon in Matthew 18, the first thing He said about it is this, if somebody is in sin, go to...if he doesn't take two or three witnesses, if he doesn't listen, tell the church. And after the church has pursued him, if he still doesn't repent, throw him out, treat him like an outcast. The first instruction ever gave to the church had to do with sin. In that very first sermon, Jesus said "If you ever lead another believer into sin, you'd be better off if a millstone were put around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea." The Lord of the church is concerned about the purity of the church. He's concerned about the holiness of the church. Sin is the issue to the Lord of the church and it should be the issue for us. But I daresay, you can go from conference to conference to conference and

book, to book, to book and this is not the concern today.  You won't hear talk about the holiness of the church, the purity of the church.

When I was at Moody this week, I spoke and I basically said to them, "You know, I'm going to preach the sermon I prepared for my own church on Sunday.  I kind of tweaked it here and there a little bit, but I said to them what I'm going to say to you because everybody is talking about church growth and how to grow your church and have a successful church and a flourishing ministry and more folks and church growth is a big thing.  And I said to them, it may surprise you to hear this but I really believe the single greatest contributor to the impact of our church, to the growth of our church, to the ministries of our church, to the effect of our church, the single greatest factor that exists has existed through the years of Grace Community Church, the single greatest contributor to the influence and the strength and the growth of our church has been, and I paused and it got real quiet, and I said...church discipline.  And there was appall over the meeting.  Church discipline?  That is not normally considered a principle of church growth.  Most people would assume if you want to kill the place, do that.  Just start poking around in everybody's life and they'll split.  Not the people who love righteousness, not the people who hate sin, not the people who want to honor God, not the people who care about obedience, and that's the church, isn't it?  That's the true and redeemed church.

It may surprise you to hear this.  I believe that ignoring church discipline is the most visible and disastrous failure of the church in our time because what it conveys is we aren't really concerned about...what?...sin.  The Lord of the church is concerned about sin.  The Apostle Paul was concerned about sin.  It left him with a constant unrelenting ache in his heart.  The problem with the church is not that it's got bad methodology or bad technology.  The problem with the church is its lost its interest in holiness.  Its lost its interest in maintaining purity.  Churches have become content to be fellowships of independent members with minimal accountability to God and even less to each other.  We have today, actually we have an entire generation of pastors and an entire generation of church members who have never experienced church discipline, don't know anything about it.  And the first thing the Lord of the church ever said to His church was don't lead another person into sin and if you know someone who is in sin, confront that individual.  The Lord of the church cares about the purity of His church.  The first act the ascended Christ ever did in His church after He went back to heaven, the first thing Jesus did after sending the Holy Spirit, the first actual act where Christ Himself moved into His church and acted is in Acts 5 and what he did was kill Ananias and Sapphira in order that they might be excised out of the church for their iniquity.  The Lord of the church is concerned about the holiness of His church.

The absence of church discipline, and I mean it's absolutely a foreign thing in churches, the absence of church discipline is a symptom of the moral decline, the theological indifference of the church.  It's a symptom, I believe, of a shallow commitment to Scripture.  It's not as if the Bible is unclear on the

subject, it couldn't be more clear. It is a...it is a lack of reverence for the Lord of the church. It is saying, "Well, I know you're concerned about the holiness of the church, but we're really not. We have other things to be concerned about." Church discipline is not an elective, it is not an option, it is a necessary and integral mark of true Christianity and life in the church. And I say it again. The absence of church discipline is the most glaring evidence of the worldliness of the church and the worldliness of the church is the reason for its impotence. And you can have all of the entertainment and all the hoopla and all the big crowds that you want and not impact the world. It's the purity of the church, it's the holiness of the church that is the cause of its power. The problem is, the church is unholy. Even the idea of confession of sin is outdated in an age of moral relativism and moral ambiguity. The answer is not let's break up the congregation and produce less accountability, let's get down to house churches where we have less authority, less confrontation, more antonymy, more independence. The answer is not let's have more compassion, let's have a kinder, gentler church. Albert Moler who is the president of

Southern Seminary writes, and I quote, "Individuals now claim an enormous zone of personal privacy and moral antonymy. The congregation redefined as a mere voluntary association has no rights to intrude into this space. Many congregations have forfeited any responsibility to confront even the most public sins of their members." He says, "Congregations are consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and...what he calls...congregational engineering." Most churches just ignore the issues of sin.

Well the Apostle Paul wasn't that way. We're learning at the end of the book here about the faithful pastor's concerns. What is it that concerns a faithful pastor? What is it that concerns Paul? Well he's giving us a summary of that starting in chapter 12 verse 19, running all the way to chapter 13 verse 10. That whole section is a summation of what concerns Paul. And we could sum it up in a word. He's concerned with the spiritual well-being of his flock. That's what he's concerned about. Corinth was a challenge. The city was gross in terms of its wickedness. People who came to Christ in that city were coming out of very immoral backgrounds. They brought some of that garbage into the church. He had to wrote to them 1 Corinthians to confront a long litany of iniquities that they were still engaging in, even though they were in the church and calling themselves believers. Having sorted out those problems in the writing of 1 Corinthians, it wasn't long until false teachers had come and along with false teachers came pride and along with pride came more sin. And Paul could see the subsequent impotence of that unholy situation and the loss of testimony, the lost of evangelistic impact that would follow. Paul knew that the problem in Corinth was not going to be whether they were culturally relevant or not, the false teachers criticized Paul for not having a relevant message, not taking into account the expectations of the Corinthians for what oratory ought to be because of what they were used to. They had criticized Paul because his person, his persona was unimpressive and his speech was contemptible. He was a lousy communicator. He didn't speak in the venue that people were used to hearing. He didn't have all of the personal charm to woo the audience. He had

already addressed the issues that he didn't speak with men's wisdom and he didn't come in the wisdom of the world to achieve divine purposes. He already had laid it down that he was going to come and speak the Word of God and he believed the Word of God was the power. And behind that came this conviction and commitment to the fact that the church had to be holy.

And what Paul feared in his church was error and sin. Either one of those destroys the church. Theological error, theological ignorance or iniquity devastates the church. Paul was concerned for his church, as he was deeply agitated no more than for the church in Corinth. I mean, we've gone through this whole letter now for the last couple of years and over and over and over again we saw the agitation of Paul, the depression that he was experiencing, the pain, the anxiety, the fears over the church and always they were connected to sin. He was never concerned that the church might somehow not be culturally relevant. He was never concerned that somehow the church might have oblique methodologies. He was never concerned that the church wasn't up on the latest technology. He was only concerned about the purity of the church, purity of doctrine, purity of life. He was like the Lord of the church, he had the heart of Christ, he was following Christ. He knew what concerned Christ and what concerns Christ is the purity of His church. He has taken a bride, according to Ephesians 5. And we're very familiar with the standards that are given there. It says that he wants to present himself in chapter 5 verse 27, the church having no spot, or wrinkle or any such thing but holy and blameless. That's the kind of church the Lord wants, He wants a chaste virgin. Paul said that's what I want, that's what I want. He said it back in chapter 11 verse 2, "I want to present to Christ a...the church that is a pure virgin. He had Christ's desire for the purity of the church, doctrinal purity, moral purity.

That's what a faithful pastor is consumed for...with. He's consumed with the well-being, the spiritual well-being of his flock. Back in chapter 10 verse 8 he said he was concerned with building them up spiritually. Chapter 12 verse 19, same thing at the end of the verse, "Everything I do is for your building up." Chapter 13 verse 10, at the end, "It's for building you up not tearing you down." He was concerned about their spiritual condition, their spiritual well-being.

The church is made up of believers, not non-believers. And our concern in the church is not to make non-believers happy, but to bring believers to a place of holiness, to bring them to spiritual well-being. And that's what he's saying at the end of this epistle. From 12:19 to 13:10 you have as clear an insight into the faithful pastor's concerns as anywhere in Scripture. He's concerned about issues like repentance, discipline, authority, authenticity, obedience, spiritual perfection. Those are all the issues he deals with. In fact, those six are what we're going to be dealing with...repentance, discipline, authority, authenticity, obedience and perfection. Those are the issues that are on Paul's heart. He's concerned for the sanctification of the church because that connects to the blessing of the church and he wants God's people to be blessed. And he also is concerned with the sanctification of the church

because that's connected to the power of the church evangelistically and he wants the community to hear the gospel and to see a living illustration of its power. I really believe that all pastors are held accountable before God for these issues, being concerned about repentance, discipline, authority, authenticity, obedience and perfection of the church in their charge.

Well let me give you a review, the first one. We did this a couple of weeks ago. The faithful pastor is concerned for the repentance of his people. Go back to verse 20 for a minute. You remember he said in verse 20 I'm afraid, he said it again in verse 21? Paul had some deep-seeded fears. What were they? Verse 20 says, "That when I come I may find you not what I wish and maybe found by you to be not what you wish." I'm afraid I'm going to come and you're not going to be where I want you to be spiritually, and that I'm going to have to become to you what you don't want. In other words, I'm going to have to take a firm hand with you. I'm afraid to come and find strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. Those are sins that refer to...listen...the unity of the church. They assault the unity of the church...strive, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossips, arrogance, disturbances, they all attack the unity of the church. Paul says I'm afraid I'm going to come and find those kinds of sins. Verse 21, "I'm afraid that I'm going to come and I'm going to be shamed, or humiliated and I'm going to mourn because I'm going to find people sinning from the past, not repenting of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced." Those are sins that attack the purity of the church. Attacking the unity of the church, attacking the purity of the church, that's what Paul feared. He feared sin in the church, that's what he feared.

That is the greatest threat to the church. It's not its technology or methodology being obsolete. It's the issue of iniquity in the church. And so it is that the first thing the faithful pastor concerns himself with is the repentance of his people. Verse 21, "I am concerned about those who have sinned in the past-perfect tense, they started sinning in the past and the indication is they may well be continuing, and they have not repented." Sin among believers is of primary importance and occupies his mind continually. He fears sin in the church beyond anything else. And the discovery of sin in the church will bring a shame that humiliates him and a sorrow that causes him to mourn. These are the things that excited the passions of his heart.

Now that brings us to the second thing. We've already discussed the repentance issue. The faithful pastor is concerned not only with the repentance of his people but the discipline of his people...the discipline of his people. Sure he longs for his people to repent, but when they will not to the degree that they refuse to repent, to that degree he will discipline them. It's like a faithful parent. I mean, you would rather see your child obey, you would rather see your child respond appropriately and act and behave in a way that is right and honorable and good, and if they don't I hope you don't just sit in a corner and sulk. I hope you discipline them. That's what the Bible calls for and the same is true in

the terms of the shepherding of God's people. The faithful pastor knows that where there is a failure to repent, there must be action taken. When the faithful pastor finds his greatest rears realized and he finds sin in the church, it brings upon him a certain amount of shame because he's humiliated because he's associated with it as the pastor. It brings sadness, his heart is broken and he mourns, but he doesn't wallow in his disappointment morbidly. He doesn't sit in a corner and say, "Wore is me," and feel sorry for himself, nor does he try to find another church down the street where there are fewer sinners, or at least their sin isn't public. He takes action. And that's what he's saying in 13:1 and 2. Having just discussed the issue of non-repentance and the fear that he's going to come and find some sinning against the unity of the church and some sinning against the purity of the church, he says, "When I come," verse 2, the end of the verse, "I will not spare anyone."

The time of grace is over. The time of mercy is over. The time of patience has ended. Back in chapter 1 verse 23, "I call God as witness to my soul that to spare you I came no more to Corinth." You remember he had come the first time to found the church there. He had done that. He came a second time, what was called a sorrowful visit, sad visit because when he came they rebelled against him, somebody took issue with him in public and nobody came to his defense. His heart was broken and he went out of town a broken, distraught man. He said, "I haven't come again, the third time, because I wanted to spare you. I wanted to give you time to repent. I...I've warned you and I haven't come because I wanted to spare you. But...he says...I'm coming now for the third time and when I come I'm not going to spare anybody. I'm going to act to deal with sinful believers."

And when it came to sin for the sake of the sinning believer, Paul wanted to confront that sin...you wouldn't be a faithful parent if you left your child in a state of disobedience with all of its consequences, when you could discipline them and bring them to a place of obedience and blessing. Paul is no different than that. He sees the effect of what's going on in the church, crippling believers and cutting them off from God's blessing and he also sees its devastating impact in the community because an unholy church has no power, no witness. You cannot convince a community of the transforming power of God if the church is characterized by sin and wickedness.

Paul was very confrontive with his churches. In Galatians chapter 1, you remember he writes the Galatians, in verse 6 he says, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel." He confronts the fact that they had wandered off after Judaizing false teachers who were teaching them legalism, I can't believe you've done it and it's not really another gospel at all. People are coming distorting the gospel. I'm telling you...in verse 8...though we are an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we've preached to you, let him be accursed. And then in verse 10 he kind of concludes this section by saying, "Am I now seeking the favor of men or of God, am I striving to please men?" He was accused of being a man pleaser. He said, "In no way do I seek to pleases men." And his confrontation here would indicate that that's in fact the case. He confronted their deviation from the true gospel.

In chapter 2 he confronts Cephas in verse 11 who is Peter, the great Apostle Peter who, of course, was with Jesus, who walked on water, who had such miracle power in the early chapters of the book of Acts, the great Apostle Peter...came to Antioch. You would have thought that Paul who came late as an Apostle sort of after the original twelve, you would have thought that he would have treated Peter with a special kind of dignity. Verse 11 says, "I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned." Peter came and was corrupting the freedom that was theirs in Christ, was acting in a legalistic manner so as not to offend some Jews and was thereby offending some believers. And Paul says, "I confronted him to the face." It's not a popular thing to do. I don't think popular would be the word to describe Paul even if he was in the church today, let alone the world. Paul confronted sin. He confronted it because he wanted the sinner to be freed from the penalties...I should say the chastenings of sin, he wanted the sinner to be free from what God would do to him if he continued in sin. He wanted him to enjoy the blessings of obedience. And furthermore, he wanted to have the church to have its power, the church to have its impact. He wanted transformed lives to be on exhibit.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 he says, "If anybody will not work...verse 10...don't let him eat." Well that's pretty straight stuff. You don't work, you can't eat. You need to learn to work with your hands. "We hear about the fact that among you there are some leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, acting like busybodies. Such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." Go to work, get a job, earn your food. First Timothy chapter 1 he said, "When I was with you in Ephesus, Timothy, I took Hymenaeus and Alexander who were shipwrecking the faith, who were twisting the truth and teaching error and I threw them out of the churches. I literally threw them out of the church. I turned them over to Satan so they would learn not to blaspheme." Paul was confrontive. Yes he was compassionate, yes he operated in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, as he said earlier in 2 Corinthians, yes he was loving, so loving that he wept tears over his people. Yes he was merciful and kind and patient. Yes he had given the Corinthians plenty of time to deal with the issues in their lives. But there was one thing he was absolutely intolerant of in the church and that was sin because he knew it would not only infect, sicken and weaken and even kill a church, and it did do that, some of the churches the Lord addresses in Revelation 2 and 3 literally died because of sin, but he was concerned with its impact on the life of the believer, too because it cut that believer off from blessing and joy.

So he says, "Look, I've been patient in the past. The time is come, mercy's over. When I get there I'm not going to spare anybody. This is a warning, folks. This is a warning." He's given it several times. Back in chapter 12 verse 14, "For the third time I'm ready to come to you." I'm coming, you better get ready. And then in verse 1 of chapter 13, "This is the third time I'm coming to you." And then in verse 2, at the end of the verse, "If I come again..." He's letting them know, these are all

warnings.  These are all warnings repeated for impact.  And he says, look at it in verse 2, "I have previously said when present the second time," and he refers back to that sorrowful visit, "I told you then that I would come again and now...verse 2...absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, if I come again I'll not spare anyone."  I've told you repeatedly that when I come I'm going to deal with sin.  Here's another warning.  Warning after warning, I'm coming, I'm coming...1 Corinthians chapter 4 he said, "Look, I'm coming, I'm coming.  And if I come, you decide whether I come in love or with a rod."  Warning them over and over again to get their act together before he came.  When I come, he says in verse 2, as I have warned all along, I am going to deal with those who have sinned in the past...and that is directly what is said down in verse 21 of the twelfth chapter, concerned about those who have sinned in the past, perfect tense.  The idea is that they literally have started sinning in the past and the implication is they're continuing to do it without repentance.  I'm going to deal with those people who have a pattern of sin which is known to you.

And you know, they knew about sinners and didn't do anything about it.  First Corinthians 5 he wrote them and said, "How is it that you can have a man in your congregation having a sexual relationship with his father's wife...his stepmother...and you don't do anything about it but you're proud about your gracious tolerance?  When I get there I'm going to deal with that man."  So he says you have people in sinful patterns in your church, they started in the past, it's still going on.  I'm going to deal with those people.  I'm not going to spare any of them.  And...he says...I'm going to deal with all the rest as well.  Who's all the rest?  Well all the rest which would include other people sinning whose sin may not have been known and then he's going to deal with the whole church for not dealing with sin.  And that's exactly what he means back in verse 20 of chapter 12 when he says, "I may be found by you to be not what you wish."  You're not going to like what you get when I arrive.  You're not going to be happy with the Paul who shows up.  I'm afraid when I get there I'm going to find these patterns of unrepentant sin against the unity of the church, against the purity of the church and I'm going to have to deal with it and I'm going to deal with it.

You say, "Is this a...is this a normal pattern for a pastor, or is this just something special to the personality of Paul?"  No, I think this is an example for all of us.  I don't think Paul hated this church, he loved them.  He says that to them.  Back in verse 15 of chapter 12, "If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?"  He says, "I'll gladly spend and be expended for your souls."  There wasn't any question about his affection for them, his love for them.  And that's the reason for his discipline.  Same thing you tell your children...I discipline you because I care because I love you.

You know, the first thing I think about and I don't want to get clinical on you here, but the first thing I think about when I read about one of these kids going into a school and taking a guy and just firing people...firing bullets in all directions is here is a very, very angry person.  Anger has totally overwhelmed that individual.  What makes him angry?  Read the Bible.  Read in Ephesians what it

says about how you can exasperate your child, how you can make your child angry and hostile. How? By not teaching your child obedience because if I teach my child obedience, then my child knows how much I love that child because I want them to live in such a way as to be blessed and enriched in all the best that life has to offer. And that comes to those who learn how to discipline themselves and control themselves. These are children whose parents didn't love them enough, didn't demonstrate that love, maybe didn't love them at all, didn't demonstrate that love by disciplining them so that they could learn what it is to have the rich reward of obedience, to be embraced as obedient and affirmed and to enjoy the fruits of discipline and obedience. Outrageous, angry, hostile behavior is a reflection of an utterly undisciplined child who is an utterly unloved child. And nothing creates greater hostility than that.

Paul says, "I love you too much not to be concerned about that which destroys you and that which destroys the life and power and testimony of the church." So Paul says at the end of verse 2, "I will not spare anyone." The verb here is *pheidomai*, it's a very strong word, it's used to describe a battle situation and it means to spare the life of a captured enemy. You have every right to take his life because he's the enemy. To spare means not to kill him when you have the opportunity to do so and the right to do so, the idea is to have mercy on an enemy who deserves death. Well Paul says that when I get there I'm not going to have any mercy. When I get there I'm not going to spare anybody, you're going to get exactly what your sin calls for. This is no idle threat. Paul's going to do this. He's going to deal with sin. And he wants the Corinthians to know that this is his concern. Beloved, when this becomes the concern of pastors, then the church will become what God wants it to be. We'll start moving in the right direction when we take the technology and the methodology and put it out of the picture and get consumed with the holiness and purity of the people in the church and concern ourselves with the sin of the church, when that is the consuming burden of the pastor, then you're going to see the church moving in the right direction.

You look at the Lord Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation in the vision of chapter 1 where He's moving in His church, what's He doing? Rearranging the technology? Is He checking out the lamps to see if there might not be a better lamp? What's He doing? He's got white hair, which speaks of His wisdom. He's described as having laser eyes that penetrate into the very depths of everything, which indicates His omniscience. He knows everything that's going on and He moves through His church with perfect wisdom and perfect understanding of every single thing going on and it describes His feet as blazing, burnished bronze like they had been heated in a furnace. What is He doing? Why does He have feet like that? Feel always speak of the authority of a monarch, his power because you always saw the monarch elevated and people were below him, his feet were the symbols of his elevated authority. And Jesus moves through His church with burning, blazing, chastening authority. That's the picture there. He penetrates, He sees the sin and He comes with blazing heat to deal with it. That's how the Lord's moving in His church.

I would simply say if you don't have church discipline in a church, you thwart the work of Christ. One writer said, "If you're not exercising church discipline...a church without church discipline is a church without Christ." Amazing. Paul says I'll show no mercy, I'm responsible to the Lord of the church for His concerns which is the purity of the church.

Well they could have been terrorized at this point. Paul's coming and he's really mad. When he gets here, folks, you better duck because it's going to fly in every direction. Well Paul's very careful, so go back to verse 1. He says, "Let me give it to you straight, every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses." And he quotes Deuteronomy 19:15, don't worry, this is not irresponsible and this is not unbiblical. I'm coming to carry out the chastening and the judgment according to God's law.

The word "fact," *rhema*, is the word that can be used for allegation or accusation. It's used that way in Matthew 18:16, Matthew 27:14. Wherever there's an accusation, wherever there's an allegation, wherever there's an indictment, believe me, every one of those is going to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This is an affirmation of the Old Testament law. That Old Testament law was that nobody could be held guilty for a crime if it couldn't be supported by two or three witnesses. In Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6 and then this direct quote out of Deuteronomy 19:15 affirms that, otherwise you could run around making horrible accusations against people and they would be held guilty without any confirmation. But Paul says we're going to do an examination and there's going to have to be verification in the mouth of at least two or three witnesses that in fact this condition of unrepentant sin is reality. So you who are right and living righteous lives don't need to fear this. We're going to go by the book.

Jesus, by the way, affirmed this Old Testament law in John 8:17. He says, "Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true." Jesus affirmed that and then went on to talk about both his testimony and the Father's testimony affirming Him. First Timothy 5:19 says, "You never bring an accusation against an elder except before two or three witnesses." Again the Apostle Paul affirming what Jesus affirmed. But the most notable affirmation of this Old Testament principle is in Matthew 18:15 and 16 where it says if you go to a person and they don't repent, then take two or three along so that you can confirm their repentance or non-repentance in the mouth of two or three witnesses, Matthew 18. The New Testament affirms this principle.

So Paul says...Look, we're going to do it by the book, we're going to do it by the law of God. We're going to do it right. We're going to do it fairly. Nobody is going to get ground up in some indiscriminate action. Paul is saying when I come the first thing I'm going to do is church discipline. Isn't that interesting? He says I'm going to come and the first thing I'm going to do is church

discipline. Why? Because the issue in the church is sin. What destroys the church is sin. I mean, nothing is as important as that. He didn't say when I get there I'm going to rearrange the furniture. When I get there we're going to try to figure out a new...a new methodology. When I get there I've got a great new technology for unrolling scrolls. No. When I get there I'm gong to deal with what has to be dealt with and that's sin and we're going to deal with it the way Scripture says to deal with it.

We have a generation today of pastors in churches who have never experienced church discipline. They don't even know what it is. Is it any wonder the church is weak? Confession of sin is outdated in this age of moral relativism. The very notion of shame has been discarded by a self-esteem generation. Shame, they say, is unnecessary and a repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment and self-esteem. This is a shameless culture, isn't it?

What are they ashamed of? What is this society ashamed of? They're not ashamed of anything. James Twitchell (??), secular observer, writes, "We have in the last generation tried to push shame aside. The human potential and recovered memory movements in psychology, the moral relativism of audience-driven Christianity, the penalty-free all ideas are equally good transformation and higher education. The rise of no-fault behavior before the law, the often outrageous distortions in telling of history so that certain groups can feel better about themselves, and the "I'm shame free but you should be ashamed of yourself" tone are just some of the instances wherein this can be seen."

He's right. There's no shame in this society. No shame for anything. The most bizarre indescribable, perverted, twisted freakish people parade their perversions across the screens of our television constantly, shamelessly. The same writer, James Twitchell, says, and this is interesting from a secular observer, "The church is aiding and abetting this. The church is aiding and abetting this abandonment of shame." Shame, you see, is a natural result of sinful behavior. But sinful people want to get rid of it because it causes pain so that's the effort the society is making, but the church abetting it? Listen to what he says, quote: "Looking at the Christian church today you can see only a dim view, dim representation of what was once painted in the boldest of colors." His point is that there was a time when the church had its....had its moral standards and its spiritual standards out in front in crystal-clear form. He says, "Christianity has lost it. It no longer articulates the ideal sexes on the loose. Shame days are over." And then this interesting statement, "The devil has absconded with sin." In other words, he's robbed the church of it, its gone, its not an issue. "Go and sin no more," he writes, "has been replaced by judge not lest you be judged."

Carl Laney[??] wrote a book called The Guide To Church Discipline. He said, "The church today is suffering from an infection which has been allowed to fester. As an infection weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanism, so the church has been weakened by this ugly sore. The church has lost its power and effectiveness in serving as a vehicle for social, moral and spiritual change. This illness is due, at least in part, to a neglected church discipline," end quote. He's right on. Until the church gets serious about holiness, its not going to have any power and its people aren't going to

be blessed.  They may be having fun but they'll miss spiritual blessing, the profounder, deeper things. Have you noticed that as the church has abandoned a concern for holiness it has trivialized itself?  Its music has become shallower and shallower.  Its expectations shallower and shallower.

Let me just give you a few things to think about and we'll wrap this up.  God has always called His people to holiness.  God has always called His people to holiness.  This isn't anything new.  "Be ye holy for I am holy," He says it over and over, read the book of Leviticus.  It's everywhere. Deuteronomy chapter 6 a good illustration of this, verses 17 and 18.  Listen to what the Scripture says, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God and His testimonies and His statutes which He's commanded you.  You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord that it may be well with you and you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers."  God wants to bless you and He will if you obey Him.  Chapter 7 of Deuteronomy 6, "You are a holy people to the Lord your God.  The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth."  You're a holy people.  Peter says the same thing, 1 Peter 2, "You are a holy people, a chosen nation.  You were called out of darkness into His marvelous light.  You're a holy people."  God has always called His church to holiness, always called His people to holiness, always called Israel to holiness.

Secondly, God disciplines His people.  He Himself does it.  You are well aware of Hebrews chapter 12, it's a very familiar passage.  Hebrews 12:5 says, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when you're reproved by Him, for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives."  The Lord will do discipline Himself.  It is for discipline that you endure.  God deals with you as sons, "For what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? And if you're without discipline of which all have become partakers, then you're illegitimate children and have no...and are not sons."  I mean, if you're God's child, God's son, He'll discipline you.  Why? Verse 10, "He disciplines us for our good that we may share His...here's the key word...holiness." That we may share His holiness.  God has always called His people to holiness and God individually disciplines His children to that end.

Third point, He's called His church to discipline as well.  This matter of holiness not only is God's individual activity between himself and a believer, but it becomes a collective responsibility to the church.  And Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5 literally he was outraged that the Corinthians didn't discipline sinning members, outraged.  He told the Thessalonians, as I pointed out earlier in 2 Thessalonians, that they had to discipline sin.  He says, "Look, if you find somebody who's leading an unruly life, not according to the Word which you've received from us, keep aloof from him."  Down later in the same chapter he says, "Take note of that person who doesn't obey the Word, don't associate with him."  Put him out.  The pattern for that is also repeated in Titus 3.  When you find a factious man, confront him once or twice and then put him out, reject him.

Can I remind you just briefly because it must be a part of this message...? Turn to Matthew 18 and we'll just very briefly come on the pattern, the flow of this which I've referred to a couple of times earlier. In Matthew 18:15 Jesus gives the instruction as to how you do this. Verse 15, "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you've won your brother." Church discipline starts in the pew. It's not something for pastors only to do, it's for us to be concerned about and teach about, it's for you to do. If you know somebody who's in sin, go and reprove that person privately. Don't talk about their sin to somebody else. Talk about it to them. If you know someone in sin, go to that individual, reprove that individual. Call them to repent of that sin. That's your responsibility. Galatians 6 puts it this way. If someone's overtaken in a fault, you that are spiritual restore such a one in love considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Go in meekness knowing that you too could be tempted and fall into sin. Go lovingly but go confrontively and confront your brother in sin. The church has to do this. We cannot create anonymity in a church. We cannot create isolation in a church. All the church growth stuff today says people don't want to be identified, they don't want their life exposed, they want to come in anonymously and go out anonymously. They don't want anybody poking around their life. Just the opposite of what Scripture says. Lovingly, carefully as we come into the church we expose ourselves to one another. That doesn't drive God's people away, that draws God's people who love righteousness and hate sin and want help. So you go to the individual. If you know someone in sin, you go to him. It's your responsibility before God if you really care, if you really love that person.

If they repent, it's over. If they don't, verse 16 says, "Take one or two more with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." There's that Deuteronomy 19:15 passage again which Paul quoted in 2 Corinthians 13. You just take two or three, go back and you confront the sin again and now you've got two or three who know about the sin, know the reality of the sin and can verify whether there's repentance or not. If the person doesn't repent, verse 17 couldn't be more clear. "Tell the church. Tell the whole church." It couldn't be more clear. It's not a mystery about how to interpret that, it's just as simple as it can be. And after the church calls that person to repentance, if they still don't repent, put them out, treat them like a Gentile, that's somebody outside the covenant. Treat them like a tax gatherer, that's the most despicable people in the society were those Jews who had become traitors to their own people and sold themselves to Rome to buy a tax franchise to extort from their people. Put them out.

Paul had to do that occasionally himself. He did it. That's the church's responsibility. Even when someone's an elder and they should be confronted...the reason you do the public confrontation, according to 1 Timothy 5, is because verse 20 says, "Those who continue in sin rebuke in the presence of all so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning." You want to make people afraid to sin because there are public consequences. It's not...there's not a mystery about this. This is very clear.

Now finally, Scripture reveals three areas of sin calling for discipline. People always ask me, "What do you discipline in the church?" Three areas. One, very important, doctrinal error...doctrinal error, unsound teaching. First Timothy 1:18 to 20 Paul threw Hymenaeus and Alexander out of the church because they were shipwrecking the faith. Paul confronted error in Galatia because people were believing another gospel. The first thing is doctrinal error calls for discipline. If you know somebody in error, you know somebody teaching falsely, falsely representing Scripture, misrepresenting the truth, that must be dealt with.

Secondly, issues of unity...issues of unity. If you find a factious person, you must deal with that person, Titus 3.

Thirdly, issues of purity, 1 Corinthians 5 et al, issues of sin and purity. You deal with doctrinal issues, issues of unity and issues of purity. All of those threaten the church. And when this discipline is absent from the church, so is Christ because unholiness in a church will cause the Lord of the church to abandon that church. An undisciplined church is as unruly as an undisciplined child and a shame and sorrow to the Lord of the church.

I want Christ to be honored in His church, don't you? Therefore we have to be concerned about repentance and discipline in the church so that the church will be holy and a proper manifestation of the holiness of the Lord of the church who lives in through His church.

Father, we thank You again for this morning's worship time. Lord, this is important, so important, so close to your own heart as it was to the heart of Paul. We realize, Lord, that we're dealing here with matters of great importance, but also matters of great clarity in Scripture. There's not as if there's any mystery about this. And we grieve in our hearts that the church can become so easily indifferent to this, so easily irreverent to You, the Lord of the church, disregarding what You desire for Your church and substituting foolishness. It saddens us that the church can become so indifferent to Scripture which is so clear on this issue and because of the fear of man, because of the fear of confrontation live in disobedience. Lord, I pray that You'll raise up a concern in Your church not for new technology and not for new methodology, but for a new and fresh commitment to the purity of the church. May pastors become consumed not with style but with substance. May they become consumed with the doctrinal integrity of the church, the unity of the church and the purity of the church so much so that they are willing and even their people are willing at every level to confront doctrinal error, sins that destroy the unity of the church, sins that attack the purity of the church. And may Your church become holy and wherever there is a holy church, we know there will be manifest power in that church because transformed lives will be evident and there will be a penetrating impact on the society around. To that end we pray, for Your glory, the Lord of the church, whom we love and serve. Amen.

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