

1 Corinthians 5 (Part 1): 1-5 • The Holiness of God

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First Corinthians chapter 5. We're going to be doing the first five verses of the chapter today but believe me, that's going to give us plenty to think about. It goes like this.

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.
² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

*³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”
(ESV)*

Now you see why we need to pray. Let's do that.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to this Word. It's a hard Word. We pray that You'd give us understanding. We pray that you would give us insight into it. We pray also, Lord God, that You'd help us to learn from the things that we see also in this passage, and we ask in Jesus name, amen.

Ah, didn't know we were going to talk about church discipline today, did you? Now you can't leave.

No, we'll have some good stuff that comes out of this, I promise. When is the last time that you went through the Book of Leviticus? Probably not one of those books that you just read for a good time. And honestly, going through, reading through Leviticus can be rather painful. It can also be a real blessing if you understand what it's all about.

In the Book of Leviticus, and I'll make a point here in just a moment, because it's like some of you guys are going pastor Paul, you're in 1 Corinthians, I know. Arteries haven't hardened quite that much.

But in the Book of Leviticus, God is basically teaching his people to recognize the difference between good and bad, clean and unclean, holy and unholy. And He basically tells the people that if they are unclean for any reason, they may not come before Him.

In fact, if they are unclean, they may have to, well, they would have to spend time outside the camp for a period until so much time had passed. They would have to wash themselves and then they would be able to come back into the city, into the gathering, and they were clean once again, which meant that they were now eligible or able to come and worship before the Lord.

Now, if you didn't know really what Leviticus was all about, and you just started reading through that Old Testament book, you might come away with the idea of thinking that God is overly sensitive about certain things and just needs to chill a little bit, but here's why I bring it up. The lessons of Leviticus are the same lessons of 1 Corinthians, and I'll draw that correlation for you here this morning.

But here's the lesson that both Leviticus and particularly this chapter of 1 Corinthians teaches. God is holy. Right there, okay? Leviticus teaches God is holy. 1 Corinthians is Paul trying to communicate to the Corinthian church, God is holy.

Now, you guys remember that under the Old Covenant, approaching God was only possible if you followed all the rules and laws that went along with it, and we find those in Leviticus, we find them in some other Old Testament books as well, and the Jews were told that since God is holy, His worshipers cannot be unclean if they want to approach him, because as we said before, if you're unclean, you can't go and worship, you can't appear before God, right? That was the rule.

You have to stay away. Don't you get tired just talking about it or even thinking about it? Now, under the New Covenant, we don't operate that way. We don't operate under rules and laws as far as when we can approach God. We approach God by the blood of Jesus Christ, right? By the blood of the Lamb.

The Lamb has been shed for us, Jesus Christ, and through His blood, we can come into His presence whenever we want, and the crazy thing about the Jews

is, if they would do something, even if they didn't mean to, they'd touch a dead animal, or they have mold or mildew in their house or they have this, or they have that, I mean, oh, good grief.

They would have to back away and say, well, I can't approach God. I have to wait for this period of time to pass. I have to go through these cleansing rituals and then and only then can I approach God. You and I, we can have a nasty fall of sin and approach God the next moment because we come to him and we say, Lord, forgive me, wash me, cleanse me, renew my heart and He invites us right back into His presence. No delay, no sitting outside the camp. Can you imagine? Can you imagine?

It's like you said, you have to go outside of town and sit there for a day or a week. Or women that, when they went through their menstrual cycle, heavens! But you got to go, you got to go do this and everybody knows you're sitting out there just waiting to be able to come back in until your period of cleansing is over, and now you're clean, and you oh, thank you, Jesus, that here we are today under the New Covenant, and I say, Lord, I just, I accept what you did for me on the cross. Your blood cleanses me. It washes me.

Remember, Paul actually said this when he wrote to the Ephesians. Let me put this up on the screen. From Ephesians 2:13, look what he says,

Ephesians 2:13 (ESV)

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (you) have been brought near (How? By rules and regulations? Heavens no!) by the blood of Christ.

That is how you and I have been brought near to the Lord, and it's a wonderful thing, don't you think? Don't you agree? It's a wonderful thing to have the blood of Jesus, isn't it, and to know that we can approach God at any time, and we don't have to worry about being unclean and unacceptable. We've been made acceptable through the blood of Jesus Christ, but let me tell you something.

As Christians I think we've lost something because of just the ease of which we can approach God. We've lost a sense or a respect, if you will, for the holiness of God, and sometimes I wonder if we even remember that God is holy. I mean, we sing about it, we say it in our prayers and stuff like that.

Yeah, I pray, holy God or whatever, we refer to Him as holy, but I wonder sometimes if we really truly understand what it means that God is holy. So much so that when we read the Old Testament, and we read how God expresses His holiness, we're offended, we're almost taken aback.

Have you ever read through the Old Testament and seen how God expresses His holiness and ended up going, ooh, that was harsh, like wow. In fact, it almost looks like God's mad, and some people even come away with that conclusion.

In fact, many years ago I remember reading about this when I was in Bible college, but there was a man and his name escapes me, but he started a heretical teaching very early in church history that the God of the Old Testament was a different God than the God of the New Testament. Two different gods. And the reason he obviously came to that conclusion was because he saw such a stark contrast in what he believed to be the way the God of the Old Testament treated people related to, or versus the God of the New Testament.

He has got to be different God, and he literally circulated that teaching, and a lot of people bought into it because they were so unaccustomed to seeing God operate out of holiness.

Do you understand that the wrath of God is the holiness of God expressed, okay? His holiness cannot abide filth and sin, and God has to respond, okay? His holiness demands it. But when we see it happening in the Old Testament, we are like, wow, having a bad day or what? We're offended, we're taken aback by the whole thing.

In fact, there's even a couple of passages in the New Testament that we're not really sure what to do with. One of them is a passage out of Hebrews chapter 12 that says,

<u>Hebrews 12:29 (ESV)</u>

<i>...our God is a consuming fire.</i>
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...our God is a consuming fire.

And we're like, huh? I think I'm going to stick with John 3:16. I love to just keep thinking about how God loved, loves me so much that He gave His life for me and sent His Son that I'll just recite that one a few hundred times, but God is a consuming fire? What are you going to do with that? How do you even, how do you even think about embracing that idea?

Sounds like the Old Testament God to me. He was always showing up in fire and killing people. Well, here's the interesting thing. God is still holy. God is still the same holy, unapproachable God today that He was in the Old, under the Old Covenant.

Now every so often, people will get a hold of this truth that God is holy. If you know anything about Church history, which is by the way a very interesting read, you will find that there are periods of time in Church history, in our history, when people have truly rediscovered the holiness of God and they have desired in their own lives to express that holiness and to see God in His holiness.

In fact, we usually call these sorts of movements, holiness movements, and we had a holiness movement that took place in the 19th century, here in the United States and even abroad where people were truly rediscovering what it means that God is holy, and that we are to live holy lives.

Some of you might be surprised to learn that many of the churches in our community were birthed out of the holiness movement. Did you know that the Nazarene church right down here on Alameda, just the next church down came out of the holiness movement of the 19th century? Several denominations did, and it birthed some powerful moves of God. But like most movements that have come upon the scene, they usually die out after a period of time, sometimes at their own hands.

The holiness movement, like so many other movements before it ended up collapsing in on itself, eventually essentially because they became rigid and focused more on keeping rules than just loving Jesus. I'm not suggesting that's what the Nazarene church is about today. I know the pastor very well. He's a very godly man. I'm just saying as a movement, those movements tend to fall in on themselves eventually, and the holiness movement did that.

So why am I saying all this? Why am I bringing all this up? Well, it's because if there's one thing our history within the Christian Church has taught us, it's that holiness escapes us. It escapes us. We are either on one or the other polar side of what it is to understand the holiness of God. We either don't get it at all, and that's where the Corinthians are at. They're ignoring the holiness completely.

Or we're on this polar opposite side where we have embraced and opened our heart to the holiness of God and all that it entails, but we end up getting caught up in ourselves and we begin to enter into the same error, eventually, that the Pharisees entered into where we become rigid and critical and legalistic, and we

seem to have a very difficult time maintaining a balance when it comes to that whole idea of holiness.

This week and next week here in our study of 1 Corinthians, we're going to be investigating this phenomenon called the holiness of God. We're going to be looking at a couple of things. We're going to be looking at, first of all, what the Bible says about it, obviously within the context of what Paul is writing to the Corinthians here in chapter 5.

We're also going to be seeing or trying to see where we've gone wrong or where we continue to go wrong related to the holiness of God. Let's get into these verses. As we look here at chapter five. Again, we see that the Corinthian church had lost sight of God's holiness.

Verse, 1 says, *“it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans for a man has his father's wife.”*

What's going on here is that there was a member of the Corinthian church who, a born again, Christian, who was involved in a physical relationship with his stepmother, and it's very possible that this woman herself was not a believer or at least not a member of the church because she's not mentioned at all in relation to what they ought to do about it. They only address, or Paul only addresses this man, but notice how serious it is. Even the pagans notice, steer clear of this sort of situation.

And by the way, in the law of Moses, God forbade the Jews to be involved in this form of incest, and that's exactly what it is. And Paul is horrified enough that this is going on in the church by somebody who is a believer in Jesus who refuses to change. But he's almost even more horrified at the response of the church.

Notice what he says in verse 2. He says, *“and you are arrogant.”* Now your Bible may say, proud, puffed up. It basically means the same thing. Paul says you guys are proud.

You're being arrogant about this man living in your midst, operating in the church who's involved in this incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Now, I mentioned to you earlier in our study of First Corinthians that this is like listening to a one-sided conversation. Someone on the phone talking and you're only getting one side of it. That's exactly the case. We don't know why the Corinthians are proud about this man being in their church. We're left to guess.

Personally, I have a hard time believing that they're proud in the sense that, gee, look at this, we got a guy who's having an incestuous relationship. Isn't that cool? I don't think it's that proud. If I had to make a guess as to why they're feeling proud about it, it probably would be that they're feeling proud about the level of grace that they're extending to this man, as if to say, aren't we cool? Our grace is so deep and wide that we're not sitting in judgment of this man and we're just, grace covers over all of these things or whatever the case might be.

And if that's correct, if that is, in fact, what they're doing there, they are then stumbling over grace, and that's a stumble that has been repeated in the body of Christ throughout the history of the Church. In fact, Jude, the earthly brother of Jesus who wrote a letter named after himself, wrote about this idea when he said,

Jude 1:4 (NIV1984)

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They're godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality...

For certain men (there are those men) whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. (And look what he says is the characteristic of them) They're godless men, (he says) who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality...

In other words, we're not going to confront people's sin. Instead, we're going to be full of grace. If you're living in sin, if you're living in a situation that is unbiblical and unholy, oh, you're not going to hear anything from us, we're an accepting church, right, and we're not going to say that's wrong. No, no, no, no wagging of fingers allowed in this church. We're just going to embrace all you people because you're just good people, and we're not going to talk about your sin, and we're just going to, we're going to leave that to God and stuff.

Well listen, that's using grace as almost giving people a license to sin and that's what Jude is talking about there, and here's the point. Grace is a wonderful, glorious thing, but it never overrules holiness. Grace and holiness are not in conflict with one another. They complement one another, and that can be hard for some people to handle, but grace does not cancel out holiness. We extend grace, but there is a point when a believer is confronted with the Word of God, and if they refuse to respond, and they stubbornly refuse to repent and change their lives, something's got to be done.

Something has to be done, and that is what Paul is dealing with in this letter. So, what should the response of the church be? Well, obviously it's not pride. So, what does he say? We're still in verse 2. Look what Paul next says. He says, "*Ought you not rather to mourn?*" This is the first reaction that Paul tells them they should be having to this man in their midst who is living a sexually immoral lifestyle, he says, "*Ought you not rather to mourn?*"

Sometimes I think we've become so accustomed to seeing sin going on, sexual immorality going on out there, that we're really not surprised when it comes in here and it happens even among those who are called by the name of Christ, and we just lose our ability to mourn over it. I mean, when was the last time that you heard about a group of believers getting together to mourn over the sin that finds such an easy home inside the Church? When was the last time you heard of believers getting together to mourn, to fast and pray and mourn over the sinful condition of the body of Christ?

Yeah, me neither. It virtually just doesn't happen, and I'm not trying to be gloomy on purpose here. I'm just saying that I believe Paul is leveling a valid question for you and I. Ought we not to mourn? Ought we not to mourn over the condition of the Church? I mean, good grief, we see so much sexual immorality. So many people today, I mean whatever the world accepts, we just accept. The world doesn't even bat an eye when two people live together without being married, and so what happens?

They come into the church; they call themselves believers. We don't bat an eye either. They're being sexually immoral, but nobody says anything. Nobody mentions it at all. It just becomes very easy to ignore. The problem is we can't ignore it and continue to be the salt of the earth. We can't. We will lose our saltiness. We can't ignore stuff like that and continue to be the light of the world. We just can't. I'm not talking about being judgmental and angry either. But, I'm talking about, I'm talking about having a proper attitude toward this kind of sin.

On Wednesday nights, we just started here a few weeks ago, our study of Ezra and Nehemiah. We haven't actually gotten into Nehemiah yet; we're still finishing Ezra. But I don't know if you're familiar with the time frame of Ezra and Nehemiah, but it basically happens at the conclusion of the period we call the exile of Israel. They were exiled to Babylon because of their sin.

God allowed the Babylonian army to come and basically wipe them out as far as destroy the city, destroy the temple, and take all the people and haul them to Babylon, where they lived for 70 years.

Seven, zero years in the Babylonian empire. At the end of that 70 years, God released them to go back to their homeland and to begin to rebuild their lives, starting with rebuilding the temple there in Jerusalem. But the city walls never got rebuilt, and about 100 years passed, and the city walls were still just completely in ruins. Now that's where the Book of Nehemiah actually takes up, and Nehemiah is a man who's living in the Persian kingdom, and he hears about the condition of the walls. back in Jerusalem. Let me put this on the screen for you. It says,

Nehemiah 1:2-4 (ESV)

Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

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You know what's interesting about that passage? If you keep going and reading in that chapter, you're going to find out he actually writes down his prayer. You know what he prayed? He confessed the sins of his people before God. Sins that had happened over hundreds of years previous, and he, but he knows why the walls of the city, why the city of Jerusalem lies in ruins and the shame that has come upon the holiness of God because of it.

He knows why that all took place because of sin, and he confesses it, and he mourns over this lost testimony to the world because the city is absolutely decimated. Well, guess what? We are the city of God today. God doesn't have a physical city anymore, but you and I are being built up, the Bible says, like living stones coming together to be the building of God. Let me ask a question. When you look at the building of God, what do you see?

Do you see a beautiful building, or do you see a building that is basically in ruins? A building that just doesn't fit well together and what does it cause you to

experience in your own heart, or are we so busy with our lives we don't even pay attention? Nehemiah mourned for days over the condition of a physical wall. How do you and I respond when we see the spiritual building that God is making with the Church, the body of Christ. So, I think we as the Church, need to take a page out of Nehemiah's response and begin to say, Lord, would you allow our hearts to be broken for your Church and the condition that it's in? The condition that we've allowed it to be in.

And as I said before, I'm not looking for people who are angry. Those are a dime a dozen. I could, every once in a while, people email me or even talk to me, and I can tell they're angry. They're just, they're angry people, period. But they're angry about the Church, the condition of the Church, and they're angry and they, and what comes out of their mouth is anger, and they probably would love nothing more than for me to let them come up here on a Sunday morning so they can wag their finger at you and shame you and tell you all how rotten people you are.

But you know what? My Bible says that the wrath of man, the anger of man does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. It's not anger people, that's going to make a difference. It's brokenness. It's the attitude of mourning where we begin to be broken hearted over the condition of the body of Christ, and that's the first thing that Paul calls for. He's not telling these people to get mad, to tell them to be broken. Don't you see what's going on with your brother, he says, don't you see how it's affecting the rest of the body? He's going to talk about that next week. We'll get into that.

The next thing he tells them to do is, we're still in verse 2, look with me again. We're at the end of the verse, he says, *"Let him who has done this be removed from among you."* Paul's telling the Corinthians to put the man out. To put the man out of the fellowship. Now, this is admittedly hard stuff. And again, we don't know much about this matter, what had already been done to reach this man, but what Paul is suggesting here, you need to know, is not something that we do when somebody just falls into sin.

This is a last-ditch effort, where this kind of an action is a response to just, it's like, well, we've got to do something because nothing's happening. There's been no response from this individual. We assume here that before any church would ask someone to leave that they would have taken action by their leaders and gone to the individual, reasoned with him from the Scriptures about what's going on in his life, his behavior.

We assume that there would have been multiple warnings by multiple people going to this individual, explaining to them the danger of continuing in this lifestyle and so forth, and it is not something that any church should ever take lightly or move upon quickly. We all make mistakes every day. We all sin, right? Good grief, if we started kicking people out of the church every time we sinned, we'd be alone. Well, there'd be like maybe one person left, and I'm the official kicker out, and ultimately, I'd probably have to kick myself out because in that case, none of us would measure up.

So, you see, we're not talking about just kind of this easy response. We're talking about a last-ditch effort when there's no other options. You might be wondering, in your own heart, what exactly does putting someone out of the fellowship even accomplish? Well, essentially it has a twofold goal, and it is meant primarily to communicate the seriousness of the offense both to the individual and to the rest of the Body of Christ, and it's also to protect the Body against continued contamination. And again, we'll deal with that next week. We'll talk in depth about what Paul means by that, but here's the point. When sin is ignored in the Body of Christ, it's not long before we stop thinking of it as sin.

When we ignore, see, it's like, have you ever been in a small group, like a small group discussing the Bible and somebody says something that's just out of left field, and nobody corrects the person and everybody in the group pretty much knows that this comments out of left field. It's unbiblical, it's dumb and it shouldn't have been said, but now it's the elephant in the room, it's been said, and nobody corrects it. Nobody says anything, they just go, okay, that's cool, let's move on.

Well, that's, you do that too often and pretty soon some of the younger people in the group are going to say, oh, well, if it didn't get corrected, it must be okay, you see. One of the things we tell our small group leaders is that if somebody comes out with a really totally out of left field comment that's like unbiblical, as the leader, you've got to correct it. You have to correct it. You've got to say, well, no that's not right actually, what the Bible says is, and then very gently and very graciously explain what the Bible says and then move on. Why?

Because you ignore it, and pretty soon people begin to think, oh, that must be okay. Well, it's the same thing with sin. If it gets ignored in the body of Christ, pretty soon people are like, oh, I guess it's not that big of a deal. They don't even mention it. They don't talk about it. Now it's important to know, people too, that not all church discipline is basically this extreme. I've been pastoring for quite a while and have been involved in some actions related to church discipline.

Believe me, there are many things that can be done before you get to this place. Going and talking to somebody, praying with somebody.

Believe me, there are many effective things that you can do before somebody would have to actually be kicked out, and here's the point. For somebody to actually be asked to leave the church, this is rare because so many things have to just line up. They have to be in place before you would even allow this to take place. First of all, the first thing is that the individual has to be a Christian. You don't ever do church discipline on an unbeliever. I mean, that would be the dumbest thing in the world, right? Christian, here's the point. People come through the door all the time who don't know Jesus.

They walk in and they want to come in here to see if there's anything going on that's worth listening to. Well, they come in and they sit down, and they're probably loaded down with all kinds of sin from the world. They haven't even learned that they shouldn't do it yet. You think we're going to meet them at the door and say, hey, you can't come in here. I mean, good grief, how stupid would that be? How are these people ever going to get to know Jesus Christ or hear the Gospel, okay?

Didn't Jesus said that it's the sick who need a doctor right? So, the Church ought to be a hospital complete with our own little ER wing where people can come in from the world and they, they're just, they're hurting big time and this needs to be a place where they can find healing, restoration, not condemnation, right? So, the Church needs to be a place where people are welcome to come. I'm so glad that I was able to walk into a church before I came to Christ and I'm sure you feel the same way.

The person has to be a believer. What we're going to see in next week's study is that Paul is actually going to come out and say, *"What business is it of ours to judge unbelievers?"* We don't even have that right! God is going to judge, it's not our job! We do have a job to deal with the body of Christ, the family of God. Right? So, the person of all, first of all, has to be a believer. Secondly, the person has to know better. Before we do any church discipline on somebody, we've got to make sure that they know what the Word of God even says related to whatever area of sin that they're walking in.

So many people come to Christ and they're just brand new in the Lord. They don't have a clue. They don't have a clue. God hasn't convicted them yet about this area of sin, and if we just pounce on them. See, there's a responsibility that we have to teach and disciple. Sometimes that process of sanctification, learning and growing in Jesus is a progressive sort of a thing, you know what I

mean? Sometimes it takes time. I remember hearing a story years ago when I was living up in Seattle, about this group of guys who started getting together to read through the Bible and they were, they'd sit around and smoke dope and read the Bible.

Yeah, and get together and they'd get all their pot together and then sit and read the Bible, and they did this over a period of time and pretty soon they started hearing the Gospel message and they start getting saved. But they're still getting together and smoking pot and reading the Bible, and then finally, one of them is, they're getting together and he says, maybe we shouldn't smoke pot anymore. What do you guys think? Yeah, God's been convicting me too. Alright, we're going to get rid of the pot. We'll just keep reading the Bible, and eventually the thing turned into a church in Snohomish County. It's a true story.

Interesting how there's this progression of just God laying it upon people's hearts that this sanctification. Aren't you glad that we don't have to clean people up first? It's like, well before you come in here you have to be clean. Thank God that people come to know Jesus Christ and He does the work of cleansing from the inside, right? From the inside. And that's what we're looking for. We're not looking for people to, good thing we don't have a greeter waiting at the door giving them the, I have some questions I need to ask you boy, sort of a thing.

Thirdly, for this church discipline to take place the individual not only has to know what the Word of God says, but they have to refuse it. They have to refuse all counsel. They have to be at a place where they're saying, essentially, I am unwilling to repent, and I don't care what you say, and I don't care what the Word of God has to say on the matter. Any individual who's confronted with their sin, who opens their heart to the Word, good grief, the last thing we're going to do is kick them out, for heaven's sakes.

And then, fourthly, the person has to insist on staying in fellowship even after learning, being confronted, and refusing the Word of God and the counsel of the people of God. They have to say, and by the way this is why this is so rare. It rarely ever happens because today, when people are confronted with their sin, what do they do? They just go to another church. They just go down the road and they don't, they're a little bit more careful, they don't let people know what's going on in their lives.

But, so you see, for Church discipline to take place, a person has to literally sit there front row, arms crossed. I am going to live my life however I want. I don't care what you say, I don't care what God says. I'm not leaving, deal with it. That's when the church deals with it. All those things have to come together for

this church discipline to take place, and that's why it's so rare. Very rare. Remember, in the Corinthian church, when they kicked this guy out of the church, there was no second Corinthian church. There was just the one fellowship, and they might have met in various homes around the city or whatever, but they had no concept of there being a second church.

When they got kicked out, they were out. Paul goes on in verse 3. Let's wrap up here. *“For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.”* And then he says in verse 4, *“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present, he says.* Now that's an interesting statement, isn't it? *“And my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus,”* he says, *“you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit might be saved.”*

Wow! Kind of harsh, huh? What is he, what is Paul saying here? Well, there's a there, essentially, I want you to focus on something that is important that you see, and that's the very last phrase in verse five. The purpose of church discipline is *“so that his spirit may be saved.”* Period. Do you guys get that? *“So that his spirit may be saved.”* Paul's intent, his goal, his aim is the salvation of the individual. It is not punitive, aren't we going to look cool, kicking this guy out of the church and boy, people are going to know in our town that we're holy.

It's not about us from that standpoint. It's about him. We want the man to be saved. We want the man to be with the Lord. That is abundant. Now, I need to address a couple of statements that Paul makes here that I'm willing to bet most, if not all of you are a little bit wondering about. And one is this statement that Paul says, when my spirit is present, he says, I'm absent from you in body but I'm there in spirit and so when my spirit is present and the power of Jesus is among you, do this. What does Paul mean when he says my spirit is present?

You ready for my honest answer? I don't know, and when I say I don't know, I mean you don't either. I have read dozens of commentaries, and nobody knows what Paul means. I'll tell you one thing he doesn't mean. He's not talking about astral projection or some dumb New Age thingy, okay? But exactly what Paul means as it relates to him being present in spirit. There's a lot of guesses out there, but at the end, that's all they are, and I don't like guessing, I'll be honest with you when it comes to the Word of God.

So, we're going to leave it there. But this second statement that Paul makes, where he says, he tells them to deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. What exactly does Paul mean by that? Well, there are some interesting

insights that we do gain on this statement from some other passages. Actually, this is not the only time Paul talked about handing someone over to the enemy, that they might be chastised. He talks about it in his first letter to Timothy. Let me show you that one. He writes,

1 Timothy 1:19-20 (NIV1984)

...holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

...holding on to faith and a good conscience. (He says) Some have rejected these and so (they) have shipwrecked their faith. (And) Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

Once again, you see Paul's statement related to this thing. He says, “*I've handed them over to the work of the enemy.*” Again, you can see his point. It's ultimate restoration that they would be taught a lesson, in this case, not to blaspheme. But we're still a little bit uncomfortable with this. Are we, I mean, is there any other biblical precedent for this actually happening? I mean, we have these two passages where Paul talks about it, but is there ever a passage where we can say, yeah, that is this happening?

Actually, there is. You guys remember at the Last Supper? Jesus is celebrating the Last Supper with His men, and He says to them, *this very night you're all going to run off and abandon me.* And Peter says, and frankly, all the rest of them too, said, no I will never ever abandon you. And that was Peter's m.o. He was the guy who would speak up first.

He thought quite a lot of himself, actually. I mean, so much so that he even rebuked Jesus once. That didn't go too well, but there were some important things that Peter needed to learn about himself, and at the Last Supper, Jesus said to Peter, “*Peter, Satan has asked. to sift you as wheat, but I've prayed for you so that when you return, you'll strengthen your brothers.*”

Essentially what Jesus was saying to Peter is this. Peter, I'm handing you over to the chastisement of the enemy and he will be used in your life in a very challenging and very grievous way, but Peter this is so necessary because there's something in your life that needs to be purged, and it is this constant idea that you have that you're something special. And Peter, if there's anything that you need to learn, it is this, you are a weak man, and that the only way you are going

to be the pillar of this new Church that I am starting is if you learn that without me, you're nothing.

And so, Peter had to go through one of the most horrific experiences that night, and the Bible says he learned a lesson. He wept bitterly after denying three times that he even knew this person named Jesus of Nazareth. But in so doing, the difficulty of that situation was such that Peter was prepared in a way for the future and the ministry that God had for him, in ways that he never could have been prepared otherwise. So, what happened? He got turned over to Satan, chastised that he might be changed, and God used it in his life to bring about the end that He desired. Sometimes Satan is God's pawn to do a work in our lives.

I don't believe Satan has the ability to waltz into our lives and do anything without permission. I just don't believe it. There's biblical evidence to show that is the case. But I also believe there are times God gives him permission to be that agent of chastisement, that agent of disciplinary action. Satan surely wants to destroy you. God's not going to let him do that. But He will let you, He will let him correct you, chastise you. Isn't that what we're praying when we pray for people who are wayward and we say, Lord, make them miserable right?

When people walk away from Jesus, we say, Lord, make them miserable. We're, what we're wanting is this, we're wanting that prodigal son response, right? That same response that Jesus told in the story of the prodigal son, where the prodigal son walked away from all the blessings that he had with his father, and he started living among the pigs, but he had to have his eyes opened to see how dumb this all was and finally, it happened. He suddenly looked around himself and he went, what am I doing?

What am I doing here? This is ridiculous! Back home, my father's servants had enough to eat, and here I am starving to death, and what I'm feeding to the pigs looks good! And he said, I'm going to go home. I'm going to go back to my dad. That's what we want, right? We want the person to come to that place of saying, look what I've lost. Look at everything I've lost. Sometimes that revelation of insight comes because the enemy has made life so miserable that all we can do is turn back to God.