

Lesson 13 | August 29, 2021

Keeping the Church Pure

Study Text: Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; Philippians 4:8–9; 1 John 2:15–17

Central Truth: The Church is to remain holy in an impure world.

Key Verse: 1 John 2:15

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (KJV).

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize how thinking, godly or ungodly, affects behavior.
- Choose to think and act in a godly manner.
- Explore how to hold others spiritually accountable in an appropriate manner.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Unbelievers sometimes claim they do not attend church because the church is full of hypocrites. It's easy for us to glibly respond that hypocrites in the church should not keep people away because we are there to worship God, not judge others. However, we do well to explore our own behavior to ensure that we are not giving the world a bad perception of the church. *(Play the video for this lesson, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)*

Opening Activity—What Makes a Hypocrite?

*Ask: What activities among church attenders might make unbelievers think the church is full of hypocrites? **Gossip, worldly behavior, unforgiveness, worldly dress. Judgment and acting better than everyone else. What if Spiro, Panama, Bokoshee or the town we live in had a history of ungodliness? Judgmental, fighting, bickering, stealing, etc.***

Say: While the “hypocrite excuse” is not a valid reason for not attending church, we must also be aware of our behaviors that might lead people to believe that the church is “full of hypocrites.” We are all forgiven sinners, but **God calls for us to live in a way that sets us apart from the world.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

How much difference should there be between the life of a believer and the life of someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus Christ? How should Christians respond when they see sin creeping into the congregation? And how can Christians hold to a godly standard and not become judgmental toward

others? These are the kinds of questions and issues that will be explored in today's lesson. Through this study we will become better prepared to understand holiness and live according to God's righteous commands. **We will look at outside influences, dealing with sin in the church, how we should interact with the world, avoid immoral influences but don't be judgmental, right thinking and the gateway to the heart.**

Part 1— Deceived by Pagan Influences Spiritually Compromised

1 Corinthians 5:1–3

[1Co 5:1-3 KJV] 1 It is reported commonly [that there is] fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, [concerning] him that hath so done this deed,

Say: Paul delivered some harsh words to the Corinthian Christians in this, his first Epistle to them, and his instructions are relevant in today's churches as well. However, in our divided society, it is vital that we separate ourselves from the sin in our society without losing our love for unbelievers who are living in sin. Like the Corinthians, some in the modern church are tolerant of sin, even within our own ranks. We are called to love sinners, and we are also called to avoid being compromised by their sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Corinth was a sexually saturated society. In the centuries leading up to New Testament times, there were thousands of temple prostitutes who served Aphrodite, the goddess of love, pleasure, and procreation, through sex acts. Clearly, the pagan culture of the ancient Roman Empire was extremely promiscuous, even to the point of including sexuality in worship. It is important to keep in mind, then, that the people who were becoming Christians in the church had grown up in a culture that set their minds to accept sexual immorality as normal, and even religiously necessary. (It can also help us appreciate the challenges faced by the apostle Paul in reaching such a city with a message of purity, fidelity, and sexual restraint.) **What sins have we grown used to?**

Sexual immorality was a very real problem among the Corinthian believers as they struggled to move beyond spiritual immaturity to maturity (see 1 Corinthians 3:1–2). The apostle Paul heard about grossly immoral acts happening among the body of believers there, and he was greatly displeased. **Christians should not accept immorality in**

their midst. Paul instructed the church to take strong action to remove sin from the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1–2).

Paul refused to be shaped or warped by his culture. His priority was his citizenship in God’s kingdom, and living according to God’s commands as best He could. His standards were set by Scripture. The Bible is clear that sex is to be limited to a husband and wife. To allow sexual immorality in the church is to violate the rules of God’s kingdom. Paul told the Corinthians to expel the sexually immoral person from the church (verses 2–3)..

Discuss

? How has culture affected your life and behavior?

? In what ways might the church tend to compromise with the world’s standards, and how can this be avoided?

Confront Sin

1 Corinthians 5:4–8

[1Co 5:4-8 KJV] 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your glorying [is] not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth.

Say: When we see sin among believers, it should make us uncomfortable. And so, we should ask ourselves what to do with that discomfort. Paul instructed the Corinthians to confront the sin in their midst. The goal was to bring spiritual growth and healing to the offender, and that would take decisive action. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we read 1 Corinthians 5:4, it may sound unloving to expel a person from a church. But Paul was careful, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to describe the manner in which this action should occur. The church was to be submissive to the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit would never do anything inappropriate toward a person, regardless of the sin committed. It is in the spirit of love that Paul instructed the church leaders to turn the person over to Satan. Many**

scholars believe this to mean that they would excommunicate the person from the church and allow his fleshly desires to move forward unabated. The ultimate desire of Paul was to see the individual turn back to God, once he or she realized the goodness of God in contrast to the pain of sin. If the church did not take this extreme action, the immoral man may well have continued in his sin and would have never recognized his need to repent. He would have been lost for eternity while deceiving himself into believing that he was in fact on the right path (1 Corinthians 3:4–5).

Casting the immoral person out of the church was potentially beneficial for him, but it was definitely beneficial for the congregation at Corinth. The Christians would understand that God is serious about His standards, and they would not suffer the negative consequences of abiding in a spiritually compromised community. Paul used the illustration of yeast's effect on dough to make his point. Just as a small amount of yeast works its way through the entire lump of dough, sin will affect all aspects of the congregation. Paul was protective of the spiritual climate of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:6). **We should be protective our the spiritual climate in our church.**

Paul used the Passover feast to continue his illustration of the importance of keeping the church pure from sin. **He noted that the Corinthian church could regain its purity if it would realign itself with Jesus. Jesus is the Passover Lamb and it is inappropriate to claim the benefits of His sacrifice, and then live according to the standards of a pagan culture** (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

Discuss

- ? How can a Christian remain uncompromised in today's ungodly culture?
- ? What is the right way to approach the need for discipline within the church?

Part 2— An Authoritative Decision Avoid Immoral Influences

1 Corinthians 5:9–10,13

[1Co 5:9-10,13 KJV] 9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. ... 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Say: Believers sometimes try to protect themselves and their families from the influence of sin by building what some might call a “Christian bubble” around themselves. While it is important to protect ourselves and our children from bad influences, God does not call

us to isolationism from the world. Instead, He calls us to be light and salt in the world. Paul expressed that it was more important for the church to avoid contact with a sinning believer than to avoid contact with unbelievers who are sinning, perhaps in the same way. We cannot expect unbelievers to live holy lives, and it is not our job to judge them. However, those of us who profess the name of Christ must live godly lives and encourage fellow believers to do so as well, in order to avoid misleading them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul called Christians to judge—to evaluate right from wrong—but not to be judgmental. Those outside the church often consider Christians judgmental, and some Christians condemn those who are not Christians and who live immorally. Paul argued that this should not be the case. Christians have no authority to judge those who do not know Jesus. This is God’s authority alone (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Paul anticipated that Christians will associate with people who do not know Jesus. He did not tell Christians to stay hidden behind church doors (1 Corinthians 5:9–10). **Christians must follow the lead of Jesus and spend time with those outside the church in order to share the gospel with them.**

It is meaningless to ask unbelievers to live righteously. Such a lifestyle would make no difference in their spiritual standing. Those who do not believe need changed hearts. A demonstration of true love toward unbelievers is a clear expression of the gospel through word and actions.

Resource Packet Item 1: Friend List

Distribute the work sheet “Friend List,” and encourage students to take it home and fill it out to evaluate their potential impact for the kingdom of God.

Discuss

- ? What is the difference between exercising righteous judgment and being judgmental?
- ? Why do you think many Christians avoid association with non-believers?

Embrace Accountability

1 Corinthians 5:11–12

[1Co 5:11-12 KJV] 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner;

with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

Say: Some people are quite willing to hold others accountable for their actions, but are less likely to want someone to hold them accountable. Yet accountability is a two-way street. As members of the Body of Christ, we are responsible for helping one another to grow in Christ. We must be willing to correct in love and to receive correction in love. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Those who claim Jesus as Savior ought to live holy lives, in direct contrast to those who are not Christians. **If a Christian associates with a fellow believer who is living an unrighteous life, while overlooking or even making excuses for the sin, then the Christian endorses the unrighteous behavior unwittingly. Paul said that a Christian should not even eat with a person who claims to be a Christian but does not live in submission to God's standards** (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Christians must be willing to confront their fellow Christians concerning their sinful behavior. In doing so, they hold one another accountable and avoid allowing compromise to grow within the church (1 Corinthians 5:12).

The difference between being judgmental and holding one another accountable in a godly fashion is often delineated by the attitude a person has toward a fellow Christian. Judgmentalism will manifest itself through a feeling of superiority. Appropriate judging of one another is based on love and a concern for the person's welfare, as well as the welfare of the church. Christians must be willing to hold others accountable to godly standards and must be willing to be held accountable by others.

Discuss

? How can personal accountability prevent the need for further church discipline?

? What can a Christian do to develop spiritual accountability?

Part 3— Committed to God's Standard

Resolve Conflicts

Matthew 18:15–17

[Mat 18:15-17 KJV] 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall

neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Say: When two or more people are involved in any endeavor, conflicts will eventually occur. This doesn't mean one person is wrong and the other is right. It may simply mean that they have differing opinions. In this case, Christian love would call for both parties to be gracious in their words and behavior. However, when one person has truly wronged another, Jesus has provided the steps needed to resolve the conflict. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians are not left alone to figure out how to proceed when another Christian has offended him or her personally. Ignoring wrongs may seem to be easier than confronting the person who has hurt the Christian, but ignoring conflict can sometimes even make matters worse. Ignoring hurts might lead to deeper hurts, allowing an offender to continue to offend. Jesus taught that the best way to deal with an offense is to address it clearly and get it resolved.

Jesus outlined the process of dealing with a fellow Christian who offends. The first step is to go speak to the person face-to-face. If both people are willing to resolve the problem in a positive fashion, it advances the relationship and the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:15).

But Jesus was not willing to allow conflict to remain unresolved if the offending party rejects the individual offer of reconciliation. The offended Christian is instructed to take another Christian as a witness who could arbitrate between the two individuals. If there is still no resolution, Jesus told the believer to take the offending person before the church for a final decision. If the offending party still refused to repent of wrongdoing, the leaders of the church were to view the person as a non-believer, which means to ostracize them (Matthew 18:16–17).

Discuss

? Describe the difference between a personal offense and a true wrongdoing.

? How should Christians resolve conflict when that conflict does not represent sin in either of their lives?

Resource Packet Item 2: Judging Those Who Sin

Distribute the work sheet “Judging Those Who Sin,” and have students work on it in small groups, then discuss it as a class.

Think Rightly

Philippians 4:8–9; 1 John 2:15–17

[Phi 4:8-9 KJV] 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, think on these things. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

[1Jo 2:15-17 KJV] 15 Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Say: The mind is the gateway to the heart. The things we allow to fill our minds will also fill our hearts and will affect our behavior. As we seek to be witnesses to the world around us, it is crucial that we control what we allow to enter our minds. Both the apostle Paul and the apostle John gave instructions on the way we should think. If we keep our minds pure, we will find it much easier to live holy lives that please God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Avoiding sin is one way to assure that the church remains pure. As important as it is to avoid sinful behavior, it is just as important to engage in godly activities that foster righteousness. The apostle Paul provided readers with a kind of road map, which would keep Christians on the path of righteousness. The behaviors Christians engage in are a result of the way Christians think. The way Christians think is determined by what they put into their minds. Paul instructed believers to think about honorable, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent things (Philippians 4:8).

Christians live in a society today that attempts to draw their attention toward things that are not pure and not honorable. Television shows regularly encourage immoral behavior, either explicitly or implicitly. Conversations often focus on the negative, even in the church. Gossip and slander find their way into Christian conversations. When Christians allow their minds to be filled with thoughts and ideas that are not pleasing to God, it is likely that ungodly behaviors will follow.

Paul encouraged his readers to follow his example. This encouragement placed a high responsibility on the apostle. He was accepting the mandate to live a holy and pure life because he was inviting the inspection of others (Philippians 4:9).

Christians must live a life that will reflect the kingdom of God to others. This can be possible if the Christian will be careful concerning that which they put into their minds. An added blessing for those who maintain a holy life is that God's peace will permeate their existence.

The world offers many delicacies. It is easy to fall into the trap of desiring to acquire everything the world offers. Many of these temptations come at a great spiritual cost. By definition, a Christian must love God supremely. If Christians love the world so much that they will turn their back on the priorities of God, it is evident that they are not living for Him and have turned from Him. When Satan attempted to dissuade Jesus from His mission, he tempted Him in three ways: through desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and through pride of life. Satan uses these same tools on people today. When Christians are being offered items that please their flesh, eyes, and pride in exchange for compromise of their obedience to God, this should be recognized as temptation and must be rejected (1 John 2:15–16).

No matter how good Satan's temptations may seem to us, they will never measure up to the prize that awaits the Christian who remains faithful to God. **While a person may enjoy worldly possessions for a lifetime, every person will die, and at that point, everything that the person has acquired will be taken from him or her. Christians can look forward to rewards that will last for eternity. When Christians keep this in mind, it will help them choose righteousness rather than temporary gain** (1 John 2:17).

Resource Packet Item 3: Which Standards Shape You?

Distribute the self-evaluation, and give students a few minutes to prayerfully evaluate themselves. Then close in prayer, praying that God will direct each person in adopting godly standards for life.

Discuss

? How do your entertainment habits line up with your desire to live a righteous life?

? How does your eternal reward influence the decisions you make today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Church has the responsibility of representing Jesus to the world, and that responsibility calls for us to be different from the world. We must guard our thoughts, words, and actions so unbelievers will be drawn to Jesus through us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

■ Exhort students to identify and reject sinful influences that commonly confront them.

- Encourage students to study the Word in an effort to know and better understand God's righteous commands.
- Challenge students to seek out resolution to any conflicts they may be involved in with other believers.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Keep from Willful Sins.
Psalm 19:7–14

[Psa 19:7-14 KJV] 7 The law of the LORD [is] perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD [is] sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD [are] right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD [is] pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD [is] clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD [are] true [and] righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired [are they] than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: [and] in keeping of them [there is] great reward. 12 Who can understand [his] errors? cleanse thou me from secret [faults]. 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous [sins]; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Tuesday:

Defiled by Deeds.
Psalm 106:34–39

[Psa 106:34-39 KJV] 34 They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: 35 But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. 36 And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. 37 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, 38 And shed innocent blood, [even] the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. 39 Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

Wednesday:

In the Valley of Decision.
Joel 3:14–16

[Joe 3:14-16 KJV] 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD [is] near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. 16 The LORD also shall

roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD [will be] the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

Thursday:

Decision To Follow Christ.
John 6:60–69

[Jhn 6:60-69 KJV] 60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard [this], said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? **61** When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? **62** [What] and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? **63** It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, [they] are spirit, and [they] are life. **64** But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. **65** And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. **66** From that [time] many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. **67** Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? **68** Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. **69** And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Friday:

Walk Worthy of Your Calling.
Ephesians 4:1–3

[Eph 4:1-3 KJV] 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, **2** With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; **3** Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Saturday:

Guard Against False Teachers.
Jude 1:3–13

[Jde 1:3-13 KJV] 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort [you] that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. **4** For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. **5** I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. **6** And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the

judgment of the great day. 7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. 8 Likewise also these [filthy] dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. 10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. 12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds [they are] without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.