

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

Strengthening Your Grip on Purity
Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–5



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Pleasure is supreme.” . . . “Follow your feelings.” . . . “Do whatever makes you happy.” . . . “Purity? That went out with the Puritans!”

These slogans of our pleasure-obsessed society pulse from the media like a strobe light, mesmerizing us into a state of moral apathy. Sitcoms depict abstinence as fit for only the undesirable or the immature. And advertisements blatantly seduce us into acquiring absolutely everything our hearts desire.

But before we burn the media at the stake, we have some confessing of our own to do. Christianity historically has been the advocate and defender of purity, but that may no longer be the case. When we watch the news and read about current events, the church seems silent. Maybe we have drifted from the call to defend biblical purity.

Far too many Christians have bought into the “pursue pleasure at all costs” philosophy. Marriages are breaking up at almost the same rate inside the church as outside. Christian leaders often create just as much scandal as any movie star. And many churches no longer place holy living at the top of their priority list. But purity, as Paul explained in Romans 6, is a powerful alternative to our culture’s formula for living.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Moral Erosion: A Historical Fact

If Paul were to step into the twenty-first century, he might gawk at our technology, but our depravity wouldn’t surprise him a bit. Even though there were no crude talk shows or indecent music videos in Paul’s day, he was familiar with immorality. Divorce and homosexuality were widespread in the Roman Empire. That’s why Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: to warn them about letting the poison of sexual immorality seep into the church.



Quotable

“You can come to church, sit, leave, and NEVER be impacted by another life. That’s tragic, you know?”

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Moral Purity: An Attainable Goal (1 Thessalonians 4:1–5)

After ministering for only a few weeks among the Thessalonians, Paul had been able to impart to them the life-changing truth of the gospel. But Paul didn't just want to increase his list of converts; he wanted to teach them to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who [had called them] into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to excel in godliness, which would result in closer fellowship with God and more satisfying lives.

3. Moral Correction: A Biblical Mandate (Matthew 18:15–17)

Purity is a conscious choice; it doesn't just happen. But what if a Christian decides to follow his or her passions into an impure lifestyle? Well, that's where *church discipline* comes into play. This phrase conjures up all sorts of images and feelings—sullen-faced legalists, strict conformity to every jot and tittle, and loveless judgment. Unfortunately, these impressions come from an inaccurate, unbalanced understanding of Scripture. God never intended church discipline to be used like a black boot of tyranny. It's actually a last resort, meant to keep the body of Christ pure and healthy. And the purpose of church discipline is always *restoration!*



A CLOSER LOOK

Church Discipline

So what are the steps of church discipline? Jesus outlined this process for us in Matthew 18:15–17:

1. *Go yourself:* If you see a brother or sister in Christ living a lifestyle that is destructive to him or her and potentially harmful to the church, you must lovingly confront that brother or sister in person and in private (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15).
2. *Take someone with you:* If the offender rejects your loving confrontation and continues an impure lifestyle, you must take another Christian with you and try again to talk with the offender. Maybe, when faced with two loving brothers or sisters in Christ, the offender will repent (Matthew 18:16).

Continued on next page



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Continued from previous page

3. *Tell the church:* If the offender refuses to repent at this point, the impurity must become a matter of public knowledge to the church. This doesn't necessarily mean bringing the person in front of the whole congregation for discipline. Depending on the circumstances, a group of elders or other church officers may handle the problem best (Matthew 18:17).
4. *Treat the offender like a non-Christian:* If step three has no effect, the church must begin to treat the unrepentant offender like a non-Christian (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–7). This person will no longer be welcome at church and definitely cannot take part in the Lord's Supper. The church must break off fellowship with the offender until loneliness and godly sorrow leads the person to repentance. Though this step seems harsh, it worked in the Corinthian church, and the sinning brother was eventually welcomed back into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:6–8).

Remember: though church discipline can be unpleasant, its ultimate purpose is to purify the body and bring sinning Christians to repentance and back into the community of faith.



LET'S LIVE IT

Before we begin to think that purification only applies to those involved in obvious, public sin, we need to remember that we *all* need God to do His purifying work in our lives. That's why Jesus died for us. His blood makes us pure in God's sight. The Holy Spirit and God's Word help us to live in purity each day. Sure, we will all fail. But through Christ, we will always receive forgiveness and restoration.

What temptations are you most susceptible to? What lifestyle changes should you make to avoid those lures? Take some time this week to meditate on 1 John 1:9 and to thank God for His grace.

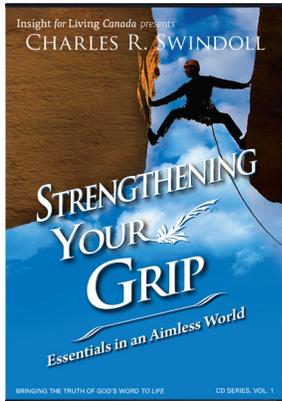


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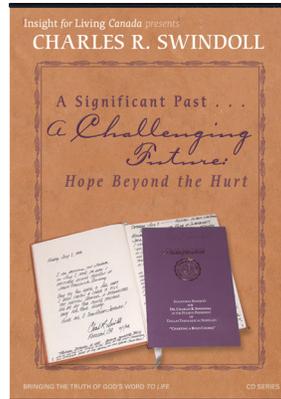
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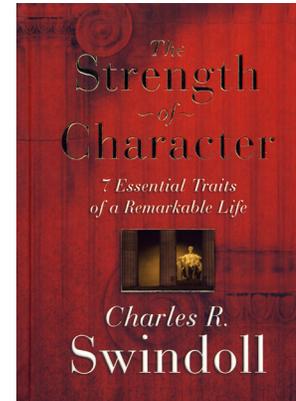
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