

# The Anatomy of a Church (9)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 02/02/14)

## PERSONAL HOLINESS

**We have to draw lines when it comes to personal holiness.** We need to be careful about what we expose ourselves and our children to. It is impossible to watch some of the films in movie theaters and read some of the books being published today without paying a price. I sometimes wonder what is going through the minds of Christians who expose themselves to movies, television programs, and publications that propagate immorality and an unbiblical value system.

We dare not lower our standards along with the world. What our society tolerates is shocking. Things that were not spoken of except in hushed whispers a decade ago are now openly flaunted. I wonder that our culture could degenerate so far in such a short time. Christians are called to live a pure life, and we can't compromise that. We should enforce a standard of purity among ourselves.

**Second Corinthians 7:1** says, "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

**2 Corinthians 7:1 (NASB)**

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

A church should enforce that standard (see [Matthew 18:15-17](#)).

**Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB)**

**<sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

**<sup>16</sup>But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

**<sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."**

That's why we implement church discipline at West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center. If someone sins, we confront him. Many Christians aren't as concerned about personal holiness as they should be. Where are you in terms of holiness and communion with the living God? We can't live semi committed Christian lives and still expect God's work to be done.

02-09-14

Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)

God's desire for His children here on earth is purity of life. It is impossible to study Scripture attentively and not be overwhelmingly convinced that God seeks above all else for His people to be holy and that He is grieved by sin of any kind. Directly quoting God's command to His Old Covenant people Israel, Peter wrote the same command to Christ's church: **"You shall be holy, for I am holy"** ([1 Peter 1:16](#); cf. [Leviticus 11:44](#)).

Because God is so concerned for the holiness of His people, they should be equally concerned. The church cannot preach and teach a message it does not live and have any integrity before God, or even before the world. Yet in many churches where there is no tolerance for sin in principle there is much tolerance for it in practice. And when preaching becomes separated from living, it becomes separated both from integrity and from spiritual and moral effectiveness. It promotes hypocrisy instead of holiness. Divorcing biblical teaching from daily living is compromise of the worst sort. It corrupts the church, grieves the Lord, and dishonors His Word and His name.

It is not surprising; therefore, that public discipline for sin is rare in the church today. Where there is little genuine desire for purity there will also be little desire to deal with impurity. The misinterpreted and misapplied statement of Jesus that we should not judge lest we be judged ([Matthew 7:1](#)) has been used to justify the tolerance of every sort of sin and false teaching. The ideas that every person's privacy is essentially to be protected and that each is responsible only to himself have engulfed much of the church. Under the guise of false love and spurious humility that refuse to hold others to account, many Christians are as dedicated as some unbelievers to the unbiblical notion of **"live and let live."** The church, however, is not nearly so careful not to gossip about someone's sinning as it is not to confront it and call for it to stop.

The church has always had need for confronting the sins of its people. During its early days many foreign visitors to Palestine were converted to Christ and decided to stay in or near Jerusalem in order to enjoy the fellowship of believers there. A large number of native Jewish converts were ostracized from their families and lost their jobs because of their new-found faith. To help support those needy brothers and sisters, many of whom were virtually destitute, the believers who had property and possession sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles, who **"distributed to each, as any had need"** ([Acts 4:35](#)). That practice was the spontaneous reaction of generous, Spirit-filled hearts to meet the practical needs of fellow Christians.

During that time, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of their property and pledged to God that they would give all the proceeds to the apostles for use in the church. Somewhere in the process, however, they decided to keep back a portion of the pledged money for themselves. In order not to appear less generous than their fellow believers, however, they falsely reported that they were giving the full amount. When the Lord revealed the duplicity to Peter, he first confronted the husband. **"Ananias,"** he asked, **"why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.'** And as he heard these words, Ananias fell

**02-09-14**

**Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)**

**down and breathed his last.”** Several hours later, Sapphira came to the apostles, not knowing what had happened to her husband. When Peter asked her if the property was sold for the price claimed by her husband, she confirmed his lie and suffered his fate. Not surprisingly, **“great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things”** ([Acts 5:1-11](#)).

The selfishness of Ananias and Sapphira was deplorable, but their great sin was in lying about what they had done, not only to the church but to God. In this particular case in the early church, God took discipline directly into His own hands and demonstrated before all how sin is to be dealt with by removing the offenders from the church and from the earth! The purity of the church not only was protected by making God’s people more fearful of sin but also by helping to keep out of the fellowship those who were not true believers ([Acts 5:13](#)).

Even in apostolic times, such direct and severe divine intervention in chastening apparently was rare, although Paul reports that some of the Corinthian believers became weak, ill, and even died as the result of gross immorality and disregard for the sacredness of the Lord’s Table ([1 Corinthians 11:30](#); cf. [1 John 5:16-17](#)). God has not changed His attitude about sin or about purity. He is every bit as much concerned for the holiness of His people today as He was when the church was born. Sin has to be dealt with or it will destroy both those who practice it and those who tolerate it. God may still act in supernatural ways to purge the church, but He has primarily given that responsibility to the church itself. The church must be “self-policing” with regard to sin. The horrendous scandals that have tarnished the church recently reflect the abysmal failure of believers to confront sinning leaders and followers. The world often has had to expose what the church tried to cover up.