

Making a Purity Covenant: Seven Practical Commitments

INTRODUCTION

Tonight we want to go through seven practical commitments that we have made as a spiritual family in the past. We've gone through this several times, actually, in regards to the issue of walking in purity before the Lord. We call it a "purity covenant." As a spiritual family, we made a commitment, a covenant corporately before the Lord in March 2008. Today, we want to renew that commitment and then break bread in communion afterwards as we invite the Lord's presence to be released upon us. We want to bear witness to the genuineness of our hearts before Him and our relationship to Him.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED

Roman numeral I. The Lord has spoken to many different ministries around the world, including this one, that He is preparing the church for a visitation of the glory of God. There is going to be a great outpouring of the Spirit that's going to increase the closer we get to the Lord's return. If you talked to many ministries around the world, they would bear witness to the fact that the Lord has spoken to them. When the Lord promises the outpouring of His Spirit, it is a promise, but there is a warning dimension to it, because when the Lord releases more of His presence, He also requires more agreement with His heart. That is called holiness. In the book of Acts, when the Lord's presence was manifest in a great way, liars would be struck dead at the communion table. This happened, for example, in the famous story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). When the glory of God is that manifest in the church, you cannot lie and you cannot walk in compromise.

We say, "Lord we want to be a New Testament church. We want to see the fullness of your power." Everyone says, "Amen, amen."

The Lord says, "If I came in power, I would also come with My standards of holiness and purity." This is a practical preparation for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as much as it is normal New Testament Christianity. We want to agree with the Lord on the issues of purity that the Word of God declares.

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

Paragraph B. The Lord appeared to John and gave him a word for the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2-3). He gave a word to the church of Pergamos, which would have been in what is modern-day Turkey. It was an ancient city that doesn't exist now. When the Lord appeared to John, He said, "Give the leaders of the church in Pergamos this word." First the Lord affirmed them in Revelation 2:13. He said, "You hold fast to My name. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam" —then He gives a summary of that doctrine—"who taught Israel to commit sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:13, paraphrased). Then, in verse 16, the Lord is still speaking to John. He tells him to tell the elders at Pergamos, "Tell them to repent, or else I will come and visit them. It will be a visitation of glory, but it will have a downside to it. I will come visit you and I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (v. 16, paraphrased).

What an intense word! What's going on in this church here is in verse 13, where the Lord says, "Tell them that I see that they hold fast My name" —in other words, that they have a loyalty to Jesus and the written Word. He said, in essence, "They love me. I see that. I see their sincerity. This is good." I'm sure the elders at Pergamos felt good about that. This is the Lord Himself bearing witness to their sincere commitment to Him. He says,

“Tell them that there is a significant thing happening in their midst that I am really against. Though it’s only a small number, the leadership at Pergamos is allowing this to continue. I have this against their leaders.”

These leaders could have said, “Well Lord, we don’t teach anything that allows immorality.”

He would have said, “That is right, but you allow it under your leadership to go unopposed. You don’t oppose this teaching.” They were teaching the doctrine of Balaam. You can read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-25. Balaam was a prophet, and his teaching led Israel into immorality.

DEVILISH DOCTRINES OF GRACE

There is a false teaching in the land today. It is growing and prevailing in the church in the West. It is a false doctrine of grace. It is a doctrine, paragraph D, it is a false teaching of grace that makes people comfortable in their compromise, instead of a teaching of grace that gives them confidence to pursue purity. This false teaching of grace goes forth and the people hear it. They feel comfortable staying in their sin. They say, “Well, it’s the grace of God! He will cover us.” The grace of God is not meant to be taught in a way that emboldens people to feel comfortable while sinning. The grace of God, when properly taught, gives us zeal and confidence to pursue wholeheartedness and purity, and gives us the confidence that it’s attainable. It gives us the confidence that the Lord is tender and that His heart is towards us in the journey and that He actually enjoys us while we’re maturing. The true doctrine of grace gives us the confidence in the Lord that when we sincerely repent, even in our weakness, that He is for us in the process during the journey.

HE WILL COME AGAINST THEM WITH THE SWORD OF HIS MOUTH

Going back to paragraph B, read the passage again. Jesus says, “I have this against you” —meaning the elders here at Pergamos—“that you allow those in your midst to teach this false doctrine of grace.” In essence, what’s going on is that Jesus says, “I am going to come against you with the sword of My mouth” (Rev. 2:16, paraphrased). This is Jesus talking to the church; He’s not sending the sword of His mouth against unbelievers here; He’s sending it against the household of faith in order to wake them up. The sword of His mouth refers to the power that is released by the command of His mouth. At the right hand of the Father, Jesus looks down on Pergamos and says either, “Lord release your blessing,” or “Lord disturb them.” By the very command of Jesus in the Father’s presence, there are consequences that are released. If we have a heart of obedience, the Lord releases the sword of His Word and it liberates us. It cuts off the ropes that bind us. If we refuse, the very sword of the Word, instead of being a sword that liberates, becomes a sword that troubles our life. It is released in order to wake us up because the Lord loves us. He says, “I don’t want you to continue down the path you’re on, so I am going to release My sword against you to wake you up.” It is a redemptive discipline and judgment of the Lord; it is the Lord’s judgment. He releases the sword of the Lord because He cares so much about His people.

Remember, this was just a small pocket in the church. But the Lord said to John, “If they don’t deal with this issue of immorality, I will visit the whole church with the sword of My Word, and it will be in a negative way to awaken the church.”

WHAT IS IMMORALITY?

Paragraph C. A very simple definition of immorality is all sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage: whether physical, obviously, or verbal, and then another that's becoming more and more prevalent, even in the Church, is through technology and the Internet, Internet pornography, etc.

You say, "Verbal?" I remember one time hearing a preacher having fun and telling a young woman, "Young lady, you look really hot." She turned red. I turned red. I thought, "Preacher, what are you doing?" He thought it was cute. It's inappropriate for men and women to talk to each other in those kinds of ways. That is stepping over boundaries. However, this is a very elementary example. There are many more graphic examples of verbal immorality, things people say to one another that stir them up, that have an immoral tone. I'll just say it that way. Immorality is very, very serious because it grants access to Satan. It gives legal access to Satan and opens doors of entry into our lives. The devil is roaring like a lion, seeking to devour you. There are many limitations the devil has in the sovereignty of God. He can only go so far and he's hindered, but through immorality we give him the key to our lives. We open a door and give him legal permission to harm us at a greater level. The Lord honors our free will. He says, "If you will give the devil that kind of access to your life, I will allow you to do that within My sovereign leadership, but it will injure your heart. It will destroy your family."

When I say immorality injures our hearts, I mean that when people walk in immorality, not only does it defile our spirit, but it injures our hearts, and we lose our ability to feel and experience the presence of God. I know a lot of people in the kingdom who love Jesus, but because they have an access point of immorality in their lives, they are spiritually dull and bored. They cannot connect with the presence of God. Immorality will do that. No matter how you rationalize it, it dulls and defiles your spirit as well as giving Satan greater access to bring damage to your life.

"THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL, WHO CALLS HERSELF A PROPHETESS"

Paragraph E. The church at Thyatira is one of the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3. The Lord spoke nearly the same word to Thyatira that He had spoken to Pergamos. This gives us insight into how important this word is to Jesus. He said very few things to these churches. They were very strategic. He brings up this issue of immorality again. Right now, in this hour, this issue is really on His heart in the Church in the nations. Here in Revelation 2:19-20, He says, "I know your works, love, service, faith, and patience... [But] I have a few things against you, because you allow" —or tolerate—"that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:19-20). It's the same perverted doctrine that Balaam was teaching in the Old Testament. In terms of our application today, it is a false application of grace. I cannot imagine a higher recommendation from the Lord of a ministry than Revelation 2:19. He says, "I know your works: You are a church established in love." Can you imagine Jesus saying to this community, "I know you; you are strong in love"?

"Wow, that is great!"

"Not only that, but you have a servant spirit, and I see your service."

"Good!"

"Not only that, but you operate in faith; you have bold faith."

“Wow, we have a servant spirit, and we walk in love with bold faith.”

“And you have patience.”

THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

In the New Testament, when the word *patience* is used, it often speaks of perseverance. It’s not talking about patience in your communication style with a friend, whether you’re patient or impatient. It’s not talking about that; it’s talking about perseverance under difficulty and pressure. “You have patience. You don’t quit when the going gets tough.” He says, “I see you. You have love, a servant spirit, bold faith, and you don’t quit.”

“Man, I want to be a part of that church. That is awesome!”

THE SPIRIT OF JEZEBEL

But Jesus says, “As good as that is, there is one issue that troubles Me.” I want us to get a feeling of how serious this is to Jesus’ heart. He says, “There are a few things I have against you because I love you so much. I want you to know that I am troubled.”

This woman Jezebel isn’t the Jezebel who battled Elijah in 1 Kings 18. This is a different Jezebel, but the same spirit. She calls herself a prophetess; she has a teaching ministry; she has a substantial following or Jesus would not have named her by name. Can you imagine Jesus appearing to talk about a city, and naming you by name as a prophet out of the whole city? The woman had a significant following, enough to warrant the Lord naming her and identifying her. She was promoting the same error as the doctrine of Balaam. The core ideas were slightly different, but basically both allowed immorality to continue under the banner of the grace of God. It was a false teaching, the kind of teaching that makes people feel, “Well, boys will be boys, and what do you do?”

The Lord says, “No, that is an inappropriate attitude towards immorality. I want you to take a stand against it. I want you to teach the grace of God in a way that gives people confidence that they can attain to a life of purity and that My heart is towards them in the process while they are going in their immaturity.”

You’ve heard the phrase, “The spirit of Jezebel.” In the 1980s and 1990s, the spirit of Jezebel was a big topic in the Body of Christ. There were a lot of booklets written, but I think that a number of them misapplied what the Bible said about Jezebel, because they normally presented Jezebel as a woman with a strong personality. They never said it this way, but typically it was a pastor who was insecure and intimidated by strong women. “Insecure pastor, woman with strong personality, collision. She’s Jezebel.” That’s a really wrong concept, and not what the Bible is saying at all. The spirit of Jezebel is being identified here by Jesus. Mostly, it’s a spirit of immorality—immorality mixed with occult activity. That is what the spirit of Jezebel is; it’s not a woman with a strong personality or leadership gift. It really has nothing to do with that. The main vehicle of the Jezebel spirit in the Western culture is the media. The main people that are promoting the spirit of Jezebel, the main people that are funding it and customers supporting it are men. The spirit of Jezebel, when I look at our culture, is more promoted and received by men. It is a spirit of immorality in our culture.

RENEWING OUR CORPORATE COMMITMENT

Paragraph F. March 2008, a year ago, as a spiritual family we came together before the Lord corporately and we want to renew that corporate commitment today, tenderly, consistently, and comprehensively—three specific

words—to resist all forms of immorality. We say, “Lord we want to do it tenderly.” Some people, some ministries, are really strong on the tender mercy, but they are weak in their zeal for purity. Other ministries I have seen are very strong with zeal for purity, but they are weak on mercy. We don’t have to choose between zeal for purity or mercy; we can have them both. That’s the will of God: The Lord wants us to be tender. He wants us to be tender. He wants us to be consistent. It’s not a momentary thing that shows up every now and then, and we get zeal for purity. God wants this standard proclaimed at every level, comprehensively, from the small groups to the one-on-one fellowship. He wants us aware of this. We are committing to resist all forms of immorality.

THE SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS TO OUR LOVE

Paragraph G. Today we are going to receive communion. Paul spoke of communion in 1 Corinthians 11. One of the purposes of communion is that communion is a way in which the Holy Spirit renews and bears witness to the genuineness of our relationship with Jesus. I don’t mean our maturity. We can be immature, but we are genuine. When we break bread, when we receive the elements with a genuine heart, there is a release of the grace of God to strengthen us in the genuineness of our walk with the Lord. While we’re purposefully living in compromise and at the same time taking the elements that say, “Lord, strengthen our relationship with You; give us the grace to make our relationship stronger,” there is hypocrisy in taking the bread when we are purposefully living in sin. We’re asking God to release power in our life to walk out our relationship, but we’re purposefully denying the relationship in an area of our life.

THOSE WHO ARE SICK AND ASLEEP

Paul addressed that hypocrisy in 1 Corinthians 11:30. He said, “For this reason, because they were breaking bread while living purposefully in compromise, because there was hypocrisy in some of the Corinthians at the communion table, many of you are weak, sick, and dead” (1 Cor. 11:30, paraphrased). One of the reasons for communion is for the Lord to bear witness and power to the genuineness of the relationship. If that relationship is not real, that power still comes. It doesn’t necessarily happen in the moment you take the elements. We take the elements and the Lord’s eyes are on us. Over the weeks and months ahead, there is an increase of grace; not just in the moment that the elements are taken. When Paul says *asleep* here, in the New Testament, when someone died, they fell asleep in the Lord. Their body went into the ground, but their spirit went to the Lord. He said, “There are many among you who are sick and dead because you’re breaking bread and calling on the Lord to strengthen and affirm the genuineness of your relationship with Him. You’re purposefully resisting the Holy Spirit’s leadership. That’s what you’re purposefully doing.” The area of immorality is a very prevalent area in which that happens today.

JUDGING OURSELVES; BEING JUDGED BY THE LORD

Paul goes on in verse 31 to describe this dilemma. “If you would judge yourself and take responsibility in this area, you would not be judged by the Lord” (v. 31, paraphrased). What he means by “judging yourself” is that if you would admit the sin in your life, and not rationalize it, but clearly state, “I’m doing it,” without shifting blame, taking responsibility, not saying, “They made me do it, it’s because I’m sinning,” if you would judge yourself, the Lord would say, “That’s good. I don’t need to judge you.” The Lord judges His people, not because He’s angry, frustrated, and through with them. He judges them for the opposite reason: because He’s committed to them. Paul says in verse 32, “When we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:32)—we are disciplined by Him. It’s a loving, redemptive reality. The reason the Lord does this in verse 32 is so that we don’t end up condemned with the unbelievers on the judgment day. The idea that Paul is referencing is that

people will live in immorality and it's like a sore in their spiritual life. It festers and it gets worse and worse. It is like a cancer that spreads. A few months turn to a few years. Time goes by. They end up actually denying the Lord some years later. Paul said, "The Lord does not want that. Judge yourself and the Lord will give you mercy. If you don't judge yourself by repenting, the Lord will judge you to wake you up. If that doesn't awaken you, some of you are in jeopardy of denying the faith. You will be condemned at the judgment day along with unbelievers. The Lord cares about you, but He will not violate your free will. He will let you do it if you insist. He will hedge you in to try and wake you up."

THE KINDNESS THAT KEEPS US FROM COMPROMISE

When we break bread, when we take the elements, we are calling on the glory of God to bear witness to the genuineness of our relationship with the Lord, of His love for us and our love for Him, to strengthen it. When the Holy Spirit comes to strengthen the love relationship and something is in the way, He will identify it until we repent of that thing. It is truly the kindness of God preventing us from continuing in that area to the point where we actually deny the Lord. I've been in ministry thirty plus years, and I know a lot of people who were fiery for the Lord in the seventies and eighties. They got into an area of compromise; ten years went by, and then another ten years went by, and years later, I know many of them who have actually denied the faith. They were fiery. They were praying in the prayer meetings, believing God for revival. They got into an area of compromise. They stayed in that compromise; a decade or two went by—it doesn't take that long—and they ended up drifting from the faith in a major way. That is what Paul is talking about here.

TURNING BACK THE HAND OF JUDGMENT THROUGH REPENTANCE

Paragraph H. The good news is that the judgment or discipline of the Lord—that's the same thing, His loving discipline—can be reversed by repentance. We don't know if the discipline of the Lord is about to come on us right now, but even if it is, if we repent, we can reverse it, if we repent of compromise. When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, his response to God was recorded in Psalm 51. This is a very important Psalm. What does a man after God's own heart say to God when he commits adultery and murder? What does he say that God receives? He murders a man. He commits adultery and murders Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite. He comes before the Lord and says this in **verse 17**, although the whole psalm is very important. "The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart. A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). It means God will accept them. He will not turn them away. He will not despise them. He will rejoice in this sacrifice, a broken and contrite heart. In our language, this is a spirit of genuine repentance. It is the heart that acknowledges our sin. We don't try to find a Bible verse to back up why we can keep sinning and we don't try to shift the blame. We take responsibility for it and we resist it. That is a broken and contrite heart. David said, "If you do that, God will not despise it. He will not turn it away. He will fully accept you if you do that." You can reverse the discipline of the Lord in your life, because the Lord's discipline is only to renew your love and to renew your relationship. That's the purpose of it. God isn't trying to be mean; He's trying to wake us up so that greater trouble doesn't come later.

THE WORTHLESS SACRIFICE OF MAN

What happens is that some people will get into an area of sin. We'll stay with the area of sexual immorality here, because there are many areas of sin, but that's the one we're looking at in this message. When they get into that area of immorality, they say, "I'll make a deal with You, God: I'll do more fasting; I'll go to more prayer meetings; I'll do a heroic assignment of service to someone. I'll do something really hard if You'll look the other way on this one issue of immorality."

The Lord says, “I do not accept those sacrifices. I don’t want you spending more time in the prayer room as a deal so that you can get away with immorality. It doesn’t work that way. I do not accept that sacrifice.” “

“I tell you what Lord, I will double quadruple triple tithe for a year. I will really show you how much I love you.”

The Lord says, “I don’t accept that either.”

“What is the sacrifice You will accept? What is the bargaining chip?”

“A broken and contrite heart. I want you to admit and resist that area of compromise.”

Now if you’re going in the prayer room to get strength to resist the compromise, that is good. Going in the prayer room to even the score so you can go out of the prayer room to stay with the compromise is a deception.

David said, “I want to assure you, if you will come with a contrite heart with genuine repentance, the Lord will accept it.”

HIS COMPASSIONS FAIL NOT

Jeremiah said it so powerfully in the book of Lamentations. He said, “His compassions fail not. They are new every morning” (Lam. 3:22-23). God will give you new compassion every single day. Every morning, or in the case of the night watch, every afternoon when you wake up, the Lord will give you new mercy. No matter what you do, literally today, if you repent of it, tomorrow is a new day if you want it to be. What a great statement! Every morning is a new beginning. I love Lamentations 3.

“NO TEMPTATION HAS SEIZED YOU EXCEPT THAT WHICH IS COMMON TO MAN”

Some people, Paragraph I, get into a spirit of despair. They have an addiction to an area of immorality or an area of sin. They say, “I will never overcome it. Why even try? I cannot break this. I have tried.” Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians 10. He said, “No temptation has seized you except that which is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13). Even though your personal application of that temptation may be unique because of your personality and the exact circumstances of your life right now, the general temptation you’re facing is common to everyone on earth. There are only a few major categories of temptation. We all have to face the same general temptation, though the application is unique in each person’s life. Paul said, “There is no temptation that has run you down that isn’t also knocking on the door of everyone else’s life. But God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear” (1 Cor. 10:13b, paraphrased). The devil brings the temptation, but God will make an escape if you are sincere about it. You cry out to the Lord and He will make a way of escape for you.

THE DANGER OF UNSANCTIFIED MERCY

Let’s look at the seven personal commitments. There is a dual application: It’s not just the seven commitments we’re making individually, though that is also really important. However, there is a second application. You’re making these commitments voluntarily, but the vast majority of our community is standing in solidarity together. Together, as a family, we are agreeing. We are agreeing that these commitments are in the will of God and that we are in agreement with what the Scripture says about them. We are not going to get into a place of

what I call “unsanctified mercy,” which is really false mercy, where we have more mercy than God has. We’re not going to go in that direction; we’re going to go into true grace and mercy. I’ve seen people make that mistake all through the years. As a family we’re going to have solidarity and unity together that these commitments are important to the Lord. We are going to keep them. There is an individual response and there is a corporate response: We are in this thing together.

THE GLORY AND THE SWORD OF THE LORD

Really briefly I’m going to go through these. Then we will break together and those who want to do this will make their commitment to the Lord. Then we are going to ask for the glory of the Lord to come and affirm and bear witness to our relationship, to strengthen it; to release the sword that liberates us or to release the sword that troubles us. We’re going to invite the sword of the Lord, though whether we invite the sword of the Lord or not, the sword of the Lord comes. I would much rather get into unity with the process and not be surprised by it.

The Lord didn’t ask Pergamos, “Do you want the sword or not?”

SEVEN COMMITMENTS TO PURITY

“Not now, maybe next year...” The Lord isn’t really asking our permission, but asking us to get in unity, and actually to get in unity, we say, “Lord we want the sword of the Lord that liberates. We want the Word of God that strengthens our heart and liberates us.” I trust that in this very hour, as some of you are hearing the teaching of the Word of the Lord, it is like a sword giving you resolve to stand against impurity in your life. That is the sword that is liberating you. There are stages to the liberation, but these are the beginning stages. These seven commitments are a six-month commitment because I want something measurable. I do not want something like, “For the rest of my life I will do these seven things.” No, we will renew the commitment over and over through the years. It is a six-month commitment that we are taking in a very serious way before the Lord.

CONFESSING OUR SINS

The foundational principle to this commitment is the confession of our sin. In **James 5:16**, James “If you will confess your trespass to one another, you will be healed.” I encourage people to find one or two trusted friends, rather than indiscriminately telling everyone your sin, getting on the microphone and saying, “I have to tell everyone everything I am doing.” I really encourage people to be cautious to whom they confess their sins, because I’ve seen people get enthusiastic about this and then get bitter about it later because the word is out now. They get in a different mood a few months later and say, “What was I doing?” Part of our healing from addictions, part of our healing from compromise, will be strengthened significantly when we make our confession to a trusted friend.

Some of you say, “But I don’t have that trusted friend...” In the same way you would ask the Lord for a healing miracle or a financial miracle, I want you, if you don’t have this trusted friend, to say, “Lord, in the coming weeks and months, bring me that trusted friend. Give me someone to whom I can actually talk at this level, where I can open my heart.” They don’t have to exist at the intimate level of relationship, but they should be someone you can trust and to whom you can speak your heart about your sins.

COMMITMENT 1: NO FOOLISH OR COARSE JESTING

The first four commitments are related to confessions of sin. Commitment five, six, and seven are the follow-through actions related to those confessions. This is about, as a community, pursuing purity related to

immorality: not tolerating Jezebel; not tolerating any doctrine at all that allows immorality to grow in our midst, to get a stronghold and then grow from that stronghold.

Commitment one: We make a commitment to refuse to speak in any way that promotes immorality or jokes about immorality. If we do speak that way, we will acknowledge it to the people, or at least acknowledge it to some of them. If you did it to a whole group, you can't get them all. However, often you'll go up later to your brothers and sisters and say, "What I said the other day during our small-group time was inappropriate." You will own up to it and make confession of it. I'm talking about people making statements with sexual overtones to each other, whether joking or not joking, including the so-called "innocent flirting." I'm not talking about actual innocent flirting; I'm talking about flirting with sexual overtones. I mean the preacher I heard who looked at the young lady and said, "Boy, you really look hot today." His idea was to keep that conversation going over the weeks and months to see where it would go. His idea was that she would say "Thank you" and that they would joke about it. It takes time to build. That is not innocent flirting. That is language with sexual overtones. It is inappropriate in the house of God. Or, even making jokes about sexual immorality—it's not funny, not to the Holy Spirit. Maybe you do it with a friend, maybe in a briefing, maybe in a small-group meeting; maybe you're driving in a car with some friends, joking and having fun. You'll get with them for a minute or email them and say, "What I said yesterday was really inappropriate." It's done then, but you do that. If your friends like that direction of innocent speech, what they'll say is, "Note to self, don't include so-and-so next time when we're telling jokes like that." This confession will help liberate you and free you from getting ensnared in that. That is number one.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 2: MODEST, APPROPRIATE ATTIRE

Commitment number 2. This only really applies to a small percentage of IHOP-KC. However, it's a good commitment to make. As a spiritual community, we are committing to wear modest clothing that does not promote sensuality in any way, that's not too revealing, that isn't too short or too tight. This includes men and women, not just women. We're talking about men and women. If you do this and the Holy Spirit convicts you, or one of your friends says, "Remember that commitment to which we're all committed? Well, it seems like you're not really walking it out..."

If the Lord touches your heart about it, whether directly or through one of your friends, you will confess it. You will say, "Yes, thank you." You will confess this to your trusted friend. "The other day, looking back I should not have worn that." That is what we are asking: to make the commitment not to wear that, and, if you do, to confess it. Some trendy clothing is totally cool, but one of the problems, one of the general overtones, not of all trendy clothing, but a specific overtone of some, is to have it look sensual. That is one of the definitions of what is cute in many people's minds: It's sensual.

I have heard people talking in the house of God saying, "Boy, you look so cute in that."

I say, "Cute? He or she should not be wearing that. That is over the line. It is not cute." I'm not saying that everything trendy is that way, but it is entrenched in the Western culture. Don't look at trendy clothing and say, "Well, it's popular; it must be right!" Much of it is rooted in sensuality. Much of the popular swimwear in the Western world, much of it, not all of it, is one step away from soft porn. I've seen people in the Body of Christ for years, men and women alike, wearing this kind of clothing. I cannot imagine where their discernment is. Of course in their minds, if they get by water, the standards change. So if you get by water, the discernment goes

out the window. The Spirit doesn't leave because we are by water. I'm talking about men and women both. It is a step away from soft porn. I have seen godly, sincere people who have a serious blind spot when they get near water. Their discernment lifts.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 3: CONFESSION TO A TRUSTED FRIEND

Commitment number three. This is a little more weighty, though the first two are also important. For most of you, the first two will be pretty easy. I trust that this one will be as well. It's something to which you have to commit, but it takes a little more resolve. The commitment is that you're going to go to the same trusted friend each time, and if you view pornography or have sexual contact with someone outside of marriage, you'll go that same friend. In other words, you don't have nine friends, so you're going through a cycle and confess to different ones, so that in their minds you've given one condition in a year or two. You go to the same one or two friends so that they have a sense of what condition your life in. You want to make this confession either to someone who has made this commitment to this purity covenant, or who has that kind of spirit and is in unity with it. You don't want to call uncle Bill from back home who is addicted to pornography and confess that you looked at pornography. He may say, "Hey, have you seen this one site?" You don't want to talk to somebody who isn't troubled by it, who may even be proud of it. "Well he is in the church... sort of. He goes on Easter and Christmas and a few other times. He's sort of in the church." I'm talking of people in unity, not those who take it lightly. You will confess it.

We set our heart. "I have made a covenant with my eyes, not to look on anyone who is going to insight lust in my heart" (Job 31:1, paraphrased). I'm asking everyone in this commitment number three, not just to make a commitment, but rather that if they view pornography or have sexual contact with anyone who is not their spouse, every single time this happens, they will go to that same friend, or that one or two friends and say, "I did it again. I do not know what hit me. The other night I was in a weird mood. I was looking at the internet. Here it is." You are making this commitment to do this. I am asking every one of us to commit to register to accountability software. We have free ones. What you do is sign up; it only takes a minute or two. You pick a friend or two and they get a notice about what websites you have been on. My two friends, Allen Hood and Lou Engle, get a notice of every website I visit. I'm asking everyone to do this, not just the people who have a problem with it, because most of the people who have a problem with it don't think it's a problem. I'm asking everyone, straight across the line: the eighty-year old grandmas; all of us. If you use the Internet, we are all in this together. I say this by the grace of God, I have never looked at a porn website for three seconds, not once in my life. I never plan to look at it once in my life, ever. But I'm signing up for this accountability. I did it last year as well, because I want us all do to do it as a family, whether you need it or not. Some guy or gal may think they don't need it; but then they get in that strange mood one day. They say, "I don't really have a problem with it; I only do it occasionally." No, I want us all to do it. If you are making the commitment, you need to sign up for it. It doesn't hurt a thing.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 4: CONFIDENTIALITY IN CONFESSION

Paragraph D or commitment four. Your fourth commitment also is confessing. You are committing to hold the confession of your friend's failure in total confidentiality. When your friend comes and says, "I looked at the Internet the other day," you pray for them for a moment and ask the Lord's forgiveness. When your friend comes and confesses his or her failure, you are committing to strictly hold it in confidentiality. If you don't, what you're saying in this fourth commitment is that if you accidentally tell someone about that friend's

confession, you are committing now that you will confess to your friend that you broke the confidentiality. You'll go to the guy and say, "You know what you told me last week, I told someone."

"You told someone? Why?"

"I just wanted to encourage him that we are all struggling. I used you as the guinea pig. Sorry. I told them so they would pray for you. I told them because I was chatty. I told them because I don't know why I told them, but I told them." The fourth commitment is that you are committing before the Lord at the communion table that if somebody gives you their confession and you violate it, you will go back to the person and own up to it.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 5: PURSUING GREATER AUTHORITY IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Commitment number five. You have gone to your friend. There's an Internet pornography problem. This is hypothetical because it's so common in the Church. You have confessed to your friend. Some months have passed; some time has passed. And yet you keep chronically falling into it. Commitment number five is that you are going to upgrade your confession. Not only will you go to your friend, but you will go to one of the other leaders in the ministry, a leader who has the authority to put boundaries on your life. We have a few hundred leaders in departments and small groups at many levels of leadership. You're going beyond your one or two trusted friends. You will go to a leader; you may bring your friend with you. You will go to the leader and say, "Listen, I have been confessing this for some months now and I am not getting any better. Every time I tell my friend they say, 'Me too. I know what you mean.'" Confession helps even if your friend says, "Me too." The confession is powerful and does change you. There is a time when you need to go to commitment five. This is where you bring it up a notch, when you have an area of immorality that is chronic in behavior and entrenched in your character. You will go to a leader who has the authority to place boundaries, to say, "OK, don't do this one or two things." They have the authority to ask you to take several steps, to go to this program or that program to get healing for your heart in these sexual issues. Then the leader has the right to ask you about it later. It's one thing for your buddy who's in the same problem you're in, another thing for a leader to get involved and say, "Here he comes again. What do you want?"

"How are you doing?"

"I'm doing fine. You are embarrassing me. Quit asking me that question."

I'm not trying to talk you out of number five; I'm just saying that it goes up a notch.

You say, "What does repeatedly mean?" Five times? Ten times? Twenty times? Twenty times a week, month, year? What is repeated?" My answer is it is whatever you and the Holy Spirit think it is; the answer is between you and the Holy Spirit. Between the communion table and the sword of the Lord, you figure out what that "repeatedly" means. We're going to break bread and ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to be liberated. Lord, as we break bread, release Your glory to help us walk in genuine love, to be liberated from sin. Some of that liberation will be the sword of trouble that helps liberate us.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 6: REFUSING UNSANCTIFIED MERCY

Commitment number six. Now this has a little twist on it. Some months have passed. Your friend has come to you; he or she keeps doing it in a chronic way. This isn't just an occasional stumble; it's months later and

they're doing it repeatedly, whether it's Internet pornography or some sort of immorality. You go to your friend and say, "It's not working with you and me. I am urging you to come with me to tell a leader."

This guy says, "No, I'm supposed to do that on my own."

"Remember commitment five?"

"Yes..."

"But you did not do commitment five. You are avoiding it. Now I am insisting you go to a leader."

You go to your friend. Don't go to the leader first, and then call your friend over for coffee while the leader is there. Your friend will say, "Wow, what is going on here?" First, you will go to your friend say, "I think it is time to go up a notch, past commitment five. You're not doing it. I am now at commitment six and I am going to do it for you."

The guy might say, "Wait, wait, wait. Give me another week or two to work on this." We are doing this in the presence of the Lord, breaking bread and asking Him to release His power on us to get free. If we are genuine, He will help us get free. If we make this commitment and pick and choose when we want to be free, the Holy Spirit will still break in, in our midst. The sword of the Lord is coming to His church whether we invite it or not. I want to get on the front end of this and be conscious of what is happening in the Spirit realm. Lord, we are inviting Your sword to liberate us and trouble us if we say "no" to You. What you are doing in number six is refusing unsanctified mercy, meaning mercy that is not really rooted in the true grace of God. There are a lot of folks out there, even in the Church, who view themselves as mercy people. If they mean mercy to help others have courage to repent, and to have confidence after they repent, and obtain a new start, that is a good mercy person. Often, over the years, when somebody says, "I am a mercy person," normally they mean, "I give mercy whether the person repents or not." That is not mercy; that is falsehood. Most of that is rooted in that person's own self-promotion. They want to be known as the superior lover and mercy person. It is really a man-pleasing spirit dressed up as being a mercy person. If they don't insist on repentance, they are lying to you to offer you mercy. There is no mercy that is separated from repentance. There is no offer of mercy. If they offer it to you and say, "Well you know I am just a mercy person," they are exalting themselves, they have a man-pleasing spirit, and don't really care about you. They care about their reputation and being known as a mercy person. Don't buy it. It is false love and it isn't real.

COMMITMENT NUMBER 7: RESTORATION FOR THOSE UNDER DISCIPLINE

Commitment number seven. This is for the leaders. This is for the leaders to follow through on the process of bringing appropriate discipline on those who continue in sin, and committing to the healing and restoration process of those who are under discipline. This is costly. Having been a leader for some years now, I know that this takes a lot of time and energy. This is a leadership commitment we are making. It is also the area in which leaders experience the most rejection. You take a stand on these issues, but you will get a lot of rejection. It will take a lot of time, energy, and the thanks you will receive is that you will get rejected, often by the very person you're disciplining. The person you are disciplining will tell the stories against you.

I have seen leaders over the years say this; I've had the temptation and even yielded to it at times over the years, to say, "It's not worth the effort."

The Lord says, "No, it is My body; it is My Word; you have to take the effort."

The leaders are committing, not only to the appropriate discipline, but to the commitment of the restoration process as well. It says in 1 Timothy 5, "To those who continue in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all" (1 Tim. 5:20, paraphrased). What does it mean to continue? It means there is a chronic pattern, a refusal to repent. You have gone to them in private. Our goal is not at all to make it known; our goal is not to make people's sin known. That is not our desire at all. But the Bible says that if they will not stop after you have gone to them in the appropriate steps, there is a place to bring it public if they continue in a pattern of sin in that area. Paul said that if a man continues in sin, they should be rebuked in the presence of all. But he also said to restore them in gentleness (Gal. 6:1), if, of course, they're cooperating with the restoration process. Be gentle and seek to restore them.

"ABOVE ALL ELSE, HAVE LOVE"

Paragraph H. We don't want publically to expose anyone's sin. That is an extreme, when it comes to that level. You go to the friend level. Sometimes it goes to the leader level. The leader may bring another leader in. There is a healing process, a process of private discipline. Our goal is for no one ever to know it; to cover the person. 1 Peter 4 says, "Above all things, have fervent love for one another" (1 Pet. 4:8). It is love that covers a person's sin; it is sin that is repented of. That is the critical difference. But if a man won't stop doing it, we cannot cover it. We give them time; we're patient about it; we're not in a hurry; we're gentle with them. There is a time where, if they don't repent of it, we don't cover them. If they do repent, we cover them through the whole of their life. We never make it known at any level, apart from the two or three working on it.

Finally, in the extreme situations, Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 talks about the man who refused to repent. They went to him and he didn't repent. Paul said, "Well, let's deliver him over to Satan"; in other words, "Let's ask God to lift the protection from him so that Satan will inflict him with a sickness; to wake him up so that he doesn't deny his faith over time." In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus, when you are gathered together, deliver him over to Satan" (1 Cor. 5:4-5, paraphrased). We're talking about a born-again believer in the Church who wouldn't stop his immorality. The elders went up to him and said, "No."

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"You have to stop. You are in the church."

"No, I am going to keep doing it."

"Paul, the guy won't stop, what do we do?"

"Well, we deliver him to Satan. We ask God to lift His protecting hand. Satan will inflict him; it will wake him up. He will repent and his spirit will end up saved at the judgment day."

Now, that is a very interesting verse. Again, I have been in ministry over thirty years. I have never done it. It's a great verse to read, and even cool to preach on. I've almost done it a time or two and chickened out at the end, to be honest. I said, "My goodness. What does that mean? What if I'm wrong? Ahhh." I've muttered it a time or two in private, but the Word says to do it when you gather together. I say, "Lord what if it's just two of us leaders?"

The Lord says, "No, when you gather together."

"What level? A home group level? I hope that's what it means." Anyway, I have never really done that. I think that in the day where the hate crime legislation is already in many nations in the Western world and getting its foothold in America, where it will be illegal to put boundaries and standards on immorality, there's still a higher court to which we can invite them. Invite them to the communion table and release the presence of God upon a community that is committed to purity. Let the Lord decide by His own sword to free them or by His own sword to trouble them. At the end of the day, it is going to be the communion table calling on the glory of God, which is going to be our primary appeal because it is going to be illegal to put boundary lines on people. All across the Western world in the next few decades, it will go to a whole different level. We have the communion table and the presence of the Lord. That is going to be a very significant pastoral strategy in the Church, one that is not thought of much today.

Amen. Let's stand.



IHOPU eSchool

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PRAYER UNIVERSITY

International House of Prayer University eSchool programs take all the training that you would receive in Kansas City to your local context through online courses and group study programs.

Our eSchool credit and enrichment courses are offered in downloadable audio and video, with course notes, study guides, tests, and student forums. All you need is a computer and broadband Internet connection.

For those who would like to study with their house of prayer, church fellowship or home group, we also offer our eSchool courses in a group study format with DVDs and attached notes.

So wherever you are, you can receive training from IHOPU instructors, study at your own pace, and be equipped for ministry.

IHOP.org/eschool



FREE Resources



MIKEBICKLE.org

Online Teaching Library

This library comprises a wealth of resources from over 25 years of Mike's teaching ministry and provides access to hundreds of resources in various formats including streaming video, downloadable video, and audio, accompanied by study notes and transcriptions, absolutely free of charge.



IHOP.org/theprayerroom

24/7 Prayer Room Webstream

The International House of Prayer of Kansas City is an evangelical missions organization centered around the 24/7 prayer room, open to the public day and night. It is a place where we never cease worshipping the Lord and interceding for our world. Join us live via the free 24/7 webstream from the prayer room.

Also on **IHOP.org**: News about our upcoming conferences, Forerunner Bookstore, and more...