***The Treatment of Confessed Sin

RV70-02***

We are studying the letter to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22. This is segment number 25. We have seen in this letter thus far that the Lord Jesus Christ has indicated that He has a deep emotional attachment toward those who are members of His body, the church. This feeling of love does not cease when His believers fall into reversionism, as did these believers in Laodicea. They are in rebellion against their Lord, but he does not cease to have an emotional attachment to them because of that. The rejection, no doubt, saddens the person of Jesus Christ, just as it does a human parent whose children choose to do evil. The love of the Lord for His sheep leads Him to warn and to chasten them for their carnality in order to restore them to His blessings.

So, alerting believers to the spiritual delusions which they hold about themselves is an act of great love. It will not always be welcome. It will many times be held against you when you do it. Nevertheless, if we are acting in the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be concerned for alerting people to the self-destructive courses upon which they have embarked in their relationship to the things of God.

Human viewpoint thinking leads to acts of sin and human good, which actually disgust the Lord, and as we have seen, put Him to the point of nausea. For this reason, the Lord Jesus Christ warned His congregation of believers in Laodicea about the potential suffering of divine discipline which they faced. This discipline is designed to educate the believer in divine viewpoint thinking and acting. Refusal to repent and to confess will lead to ever-increasing levels of punishment, even to the point of physical death.

One of the responsibilities and the objectives, therefore, of the pastor-teacher is to enable the flock to avoid divine discipline. He shares the Lord's concern to maximize the believers' rewards in heaven. That is what is behind everything that the Lord does – to maximize the believers' rewards in heaven. A pastor-teacher, who is an elder under the Chief Elder Jesus Christ, pursues that same goal.

The apostle Paul was that kind of a pastor-teacher. He expressed his desire to see the Laodicean Christians (these very people of whom we are studying). The apostle Paul had never met them, by and large, face-to-face. They didn't, as a congregation, know him face-to-face. Yet, he was very much aware of what was going on in Laodicea. Laodicea was one of the three cities in the Lycus Valley in that part of Asia Minor. Laodicea was actually just across the valley from Hierapolis. They could see each other. 12 miles upstream was Colossae. These were three major church groups all in one specific area.

The apostle Paul, when writing to the Christians in the city of Colossae, writes to the Colossian Christians, and he makes a reference to his concern for not only them, but also the adjoining city of Laodicea. In Colossians 1:28, the apostle says, concerning Jesus Christ, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Paul says, "My concern, as a teacher of the Word of God, is to warn people and to alert them to the dangers that they face in terms of personal divine discipline, and in terms of personal loss of eternal reward." Both of these are very serious matters. Paul says, "My objective is to present every Christian person perfect (that is, mature) in Christ Jesus. Paul said, "What I want to see is a fully constructed spiritual maturity structure in every soul."

Verse 29: "For this I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me mightily." Paul says, "This is what I work for. This is what I strive for and what I agonize over. I really put my life on the line in behalf of this, through the power of God which works in me."

Then, in Colossians 2:1, Paul says, "For I would that you know what great conflict (agony is the idea here) – what great agony I have for you at Colossae, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh," perhaps referring to the city of Hierapolis as well.

So, the apostle Paul here, interestingly enough, knows that there is a problem in Laodicea. The word has come back to him. The very thing that the Lord Jesus makes very clear to the Laodicean Christians, of the condition that they have fallen into reversionism in their backslidden condition from the truth of the Word of God, is the thing that concerned the apostle Paul. When the Lord is concerned for the spiritual status of believers, it is only natural that those who teach believers would be concerned as well.

Therefore, Paul warned, and he taught with divine viewpoint, those to whom he ministered. He did this at great personal sacrifice in order to bring Christians to spiritual maturity. And you will have to do it at personal sacrifice. There will be Christians to whom you do seek to bring the enlightenment of the Word of God, or to alert them to a dangerous course that they're on, who you need to warn of foolishness that they are pursuing, which can only be to their destruction. They will strike back at you. They will wound you. They will speak to you in such a way as to even crush you. But that is part of the paying of the price of joining in with the Lord Jesus in His suffering. That's how you and I share the sufferings of Christ. We can't share the sufferings in terms of paying for sin, but we do share the sufferings in terms of alerting people to what He has accomplished in removing their guilt.

So, at personal sacrifice, Paul says, "I have spoken to you to bring you to this maturity." Paul included here the reversionistic Christians in Laodicea, though they had never met him face-to-face. His concern for others is particularly touching in this case because he wrote this letter from the agony of the house imprisonment that he was experiencing in Rome. Paul was concerned for these Christians who were in Laodicea, way off at a great distance while he sat in prison in Rome, that he only knows about by contact with them through other sources. He knows the agony of sitting in that prison, awaiting trial for what may be his life – a trial which was perhaps going to end in his death sentence. So, while bearing that personal burden, he is yet concerned for what is happening to the Laodicean Christians.

So, the apostle Paul certainly reflected the quality of a teacher of the Word of God who could enter into the same attitude that the Lord Himself expresses here toward the Laodicean Christians – toward Christians who are in reversionism. Christians who are reversionistic Christians are wounded, and they deserve our maximum sympathy and help.

Once a believer goes positive to divine discipline, a very happy thing takes place. It changes from suffering to blessing, whether the discipline, as such, actually ceases or not. But believers must know how to cope with the realization of their evil. That is part of the other problem involved in discipline. When the discipline comes, and we wake up to the fact of what we have been doing, and then we are crushed perhaps by the realization of the evil activity, and we turn to the Lord and confess, now what happens? At that point, a very dangerous possibility arises. The Christian at that point, having made his confession and having responded with a positive attitude toward the divine discipline, now enters a very hazardous point in his Christian experience. It is necessary to know how to handle it.

You can imagine that it came as a real shock to these people in Laodicea when they finally realized what was really true about them. They thought they were so sophisticated; they thought they were so elite; and, they thought they were so intellectual. They had picked up those attitudes from that society that surrounded them. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ comes along and says, "You're poor; you're blind; and, you're naked." He could not have struck them at more sensitive points as to what they thought about themselves. If there was anything they didn't think about themselves, it was that they were poor, or blind, or naked.

So, a wrong attitude can easily follow after the crushing blow of realizing how wrong you were about yourself. When you see yourself as you really are; when you get downwind of yourself; and, you really smell how bad you are, so that you understand why God is disgusted to the point of nausea, then you are in a dangerous position of having a reaction which you should not have. A wrong attitude after the point of repentance and confession can indeed undo all the benefits of the divine discipline.

**Be Zealous**

So, we're going to begin here at Revelation 3:19. We're going to move to the point of repentance, and what follows after: "As many as I love, I rebuke (I warn with words – that's internal), and then I chasten (that's external) with divine discipline." The Lord Jesus Christ then says, "Act with zeal. Be zealous." This word looks like this in the Greek Bible: "zeleuo." The word "zeleuo" means "to boil." It comes from the word "zeo" which means "to boil." What this word means is "to get hot for something." Here, it is to get hot over the idea of returning from reversionism. It is in the present tense. The Lord is saying, "Your constant attitude, when you've discovered that you have deviated from the Word of God and from the principles of doctrine, is to be eager to get back." Just have a hot attitude (a burning desire) to turn around and reverse course. This particular verb is in the active voice, which means that you have to do it. Active means that the Christian personally must take this action. Someone else can't do it for you.

But it is a very serious matter with God, and therefore it is put in the imperative mood, which means it is a divine command. This is not an option. The Lord Jesus is in effect saying, "Get hot for reversing your course. Get hot for returning from reversionism, or else." There is a big "or else" in this imperative command.

You will remember that these Laodiceans were condemned in Revelation 3:15-16 for the fact that they were not boiling hot. That was a related word. We had the word "zestos." All of these words come from this basic word "zeo" which means "to boil." These people just were not boiling hot. As we have seen, the word "hot" was to be a spiritual Christian. They were not spiritual. They were lukewarm. They were carnal. They were reversionistic.

So, they are called upon now, in no uncertain terms, to abandon the lukewarmness of reversionism, and to embrace with a hot zeal the rejection of reversionism, and to embrace spirituality. They are to abandon the self-delusion which has made them spiritually poor, naked, and blind. The restoration of their spiritual maturity structure will take time, but it must be zealously (with a fervent heat) pursued.

"Be zealous, therefore." The word "therefore" looks like this: "oun." It is interjected here to call their attention to the consequences in view of the potential pain of God's discipline: "Get hot for turning around and moving out of carnality, because of what potentially is before you." This is enunciating the principle which is taught in 1 Corinthians 11:31, where Paul says, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." This word "therefore" is saying that you can avoid all the agony if you will take action. The price of carnality is never worth it.

**Repent**

So, the Lord Jesus says, "Be zealous to reverse course in view of the consequences and," then He adds what they are to do. Instead, they are to repent. The Greek word is "metanoeo" which is a very important New Testament Greek word. You should know what this word "repent" ("metanoeo") means in Greek. This is a word you should be well acquainted with in this congregation. You be immediately be able to give a definition. What does repent mean? It means "to change one's mind." That's all that repent means. Repent does not mean to cry. Repent does not mean to be sorry. Repent does not mean to agonize. Repent does not mean to promise to do better. Repent means one thing, and one thing only: "to change your mind." Human beings have interjected, and have added to the concept of repentance, human viewpoint ideas, but they do not lie within this Greek word. It means simply "to change your mind."

These Laodiceans are to change their minds about their self-estimate. This is in the aorist tense. Therefore, He is speaking about a point of decision to admit their true loathsome spiritual condition, and to change. It is active because, again, these Laodicean Christians must personally take the steps of turning around. But again, there is no option here. It is again in the imperative mood, which means a divine command. Again, you have in the background that feeling of: "Do this, or else." You are to change your mind. What He is telling the Laodicean Christians is that they must begin a program of recovery from reversionism, and to restore the spiritual maturity structures in their souls.

Now, I should say that repentance is sometimes accompanied by sorrow in some Christians, but it is not part of the idea of repentance. What the sorrow actually does is simply to lead to repentance. This is taught in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. Paul says, "For though I made you sorry with the letter, I do not repent, though I did repent, for I perceived that the same epistle has made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I do not rejoice that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance." Now, that first Corinthian letter to them was a very harsh letter, but Paul says, "I don't care that that made you feel sorry." That doesn't mean anything. Just feeling sorry gets you nowhere. But he said, "I am glad that you did sorrow in terms of a sorrow that led you to repentance."

"Now I do not rejoice that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance. For you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world works death. For, behold, this very same thing that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you. Yea, what clearing of yourselves. Yea, what indignation. Yea, what fear. Yea, what vehement desire. Yea, what zeal. Yea, what full punishment. In all things, you have proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." So, the apostle Paul says, "Many good things resulted out of the sorrow that led to your repentance."

Now, the Laodicean Christians are to secure for themselves the gold of Bible doctrine in their human spirits; to put on the white garment of experiential sanctification; and, to apply the eye salve of spirituality to see the will of God for themselves. That's what all this is about. That's what he is saying: they must turn around and return to. Failure to do this will result in the various steps of chastening: the warning stage; the pressure stage; and, the execution (or death) stage, where they will be removed. In fact, the very existence of the Laodicean congregation was on the line. The Lord is saying, "I'm going to wipe you out as a church. I'm warning you. I'm going to put pressure upon you. Then I'm going to go to stage three, and I'm just going to remove you as a functioning church." It is very important to know what the Bible teaches; to conform to it; and, to avoid the need for divine discipline. It is only the arrogance of the old sin nature that thinks that it can ignore God's standards.

Now, having done that, suppose the people at Laodicea came under conviction after they heard this letter read by their pastor, and they were just crushed with the realization that they had a totally distorted view of their own spiritual condition. The Spirit of God brought conviction, and the light broke through, and they began to put little pieces together to see how far they were out of line with doctrinal principles. So, they came to repentance and to confession.

**The Treatment of Confessed Sins**

That brings us to the point of what a Christian must be careful not to fall into once confession has been made. The treatment of confessed sins is important.

1. **Forget the Sin**

The first point we have to make is that once a sin has been confessed; once divine discipline has done its work; once we have been brought to repentance; and, once that confession has been made, that *the sin must be forgotten*. You must never agonize further over a confessed sin. In Philippians 3:13-14, the apostle Paul says, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth into those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The doctrinal principle is this: *Sin forgiven is sin forgotten.* That's the way God acts. You and I dare not act in any other way. Sin which is forgiven is forgotten sin. The Bible is very clear on that principle.

For example, in Isaiah 43:25, God the Holy Spirit says this: "I, even I, am He who blot out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." Here is Jehovah God – the Creator Living God. He says, "I'm the one who blots out sin." And only He can, because only He can provide the basis for blotting out moral guilt. Then he says, "When I do it, I don't remember it anymore." That's an amazing statement for the omniscient God to say: "I don't remember your sins once I have forgiven them."

Isaiah 38:17: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness, but You have, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back." The prophet says that God has shown him that his sins have been placed behind God's back. What does that mean, relative to God remembering them, or ever seeing them again? What this is saying is that God has placed this between His shoulder blades, putting it into anthropomorphic terms. What if you turned your head around and tried to see something between your shoulder blades? If you try it, you'll hurt yourself. You cannot see what is behind your back between your shoulder blades. It's a place where you cannot turn your head and look. That's the point here.

In Jeremiah 31:34, this same principle is enunciated: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me." This is in that great millennial era: "'From the least of them, unto the greatest of them,' said the Lord, 'For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'" Here again, God says, "When I forgive, I forget."

Psalm 103:12: "As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." That's as far as you can go. East and West cannot meet. They are irrevocably separated. God says, "Once I forgive your sins, they are irrevocably separated from any point of contact with Me." That's good to know. God does not keep records of our sins. All that is forgiven is also forgotten.

Now, that is not the way human viewpoint works. Have you ever heard somebody say, "I'll forgive you, but I won't forget it?" That is a contradictory statement. You cannot say, "Oh yes, I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget it. I'll always remember it." You cannot say, "I forgive you, and I remember it." Those are contradictory terms. It is just one of the distortions and one of the delusions of human viewpoint.

Failure to forget one's confessed sins will lead to new sins and loss of temporal fellowship all over again. That's the problem in coming to repentance – making confession, and then brooding over the confessed sin. The moment you go into brooding and potential guilt complex, you have fallen again into sin. Brooding over confessed sin leads to guilt complex. A guilt complex is a sin, and it knocks you right back out of fellowship. A guilt complex is a sin because it suggests that there is some sin which Jesus Christ could not pay for with His death on the cross, and erase completely. When you have a guilt complex over something that you have done that's evil, and that you have brought to the Lord in confession, and it's still bug you and bothers you, you are playing the arrogant role of saying, "There was something that Christ, on Calvary's hill could not erase." Therefore, it is still an issue, when God says, that with Him, it is forgotten.

**Guilt**

This is human arrogance. It insults God's solution for the sin problem. Remember that only God could come up with a solution that satisfies divine integrity; and, that satisfies divine holiness. Guilt complex mentality is also very dangerous, because that's the person that goes insane in the head. The guilt complex mentality is the type that goes bananas. The guilt complex mentality is the type that is mentally unstable. Therefore, God knows that. God says that you cannot live with a guilt complex. You cannot live under that tension. You cannot live under a sense of guilt. Guilt must be released, and there is only one way to release guilt, and that is by confession. The guilt can be released because you know that God has forgiven it. But if you confess, and don't really believe that God has forgiven and forgotten, then you have stepped right back into another sin. The tension of guilt can only be released by forgiveness, and God has provided the forgiveness. So, any other substitute to relieve the guilt is pointless.

This is a major way that Satan uses to get Christians incapacitated in the angelic conflict – feeling guilty over confessed sins. Remembering confessed sins may also put you in the danger of attributing later troubles in your life (later sufferings in your life) to that sin.

Every now and then, some Christian, who does not understand how God works in terms of forgiveness of sin, thinks that something is happening in his life, and he looks back in the past, and he says, "Oh I did that. I was guilty of that in the past, and God is punishing me now." That is human viewpoint rot. Don't ever be guilty of it. God does not punish for past confessed evils. He cannot because He can't even remember them. God sits up in heavens, and He says, "Now what was that that he did?" And He tries to think, and He just cannot remember it. No matter how He tries, He says, "I just can't remember what that was that he did." And if He can't remember it, then obviously He can't act upon it to be punishing you. He does not act upon forgotten sin. Discipline is always for current evils. It is never for past confessed and forgotten sin.

There may be a little variation in one case. 1 John 5:16 speaks about the sin unto death. The sin unto death is, in a way, a punishment for a past sin, but it is still a past sin which you have not dealt with. It is persistence in that sin, even though it may be in the past. The sin unto death may come some time later over the act that you persisted in and refused to bring to resolution. But, basically, discipline is for current sin. It's our old illustration of being in the inner circle, and out of the inner circle.

Continuous suffering for confession, again, is not punishment; it is, rather, blessing. It's training in some area. You enter a new sin of being negative to the fact that God says that He remembers your sin no more. It is, therefore, bringing upon yourself foolish additional discipline.

Now, a sin may have long-range effects in the nature of the act. We must recognize that. There are some sinful acts that a person does that have consequences that you can't just wipe out of existence. They are right there before your eyes, and they continue. But even then, this is not divine discipline. That remaining result of your evil act is again the thing that God now provides grace for you to deal with in such a way that it becomes a blessing.

With the mental attitude of a guilt complex, you cannot enjoy life for the simple reason that you're waiting for the next blow to fall. You cannot exercise faith rest. That's why it is sinful to attribute that God is doing something to you on the basis of some past action. You are forever waiting for something to come to you as a result of what you have done.

**Bitterness**

There's another danger with confessed and forgiven sin. God has forgiven you a particular sin, and you start thinking about it, and you recall that sin, and you react with bitterness to it. The bitterness may be toward the Lord because of the suffering that you endured. The bitterness may be toward someone else that you are blaming for having gotten you into that position. That is a favorite way to compound your discipline from God – to come in and blame someone else for some sin that you have been guilty of. You create a bitterness by that point, and direct it at that individual. Your relaxed mental attitude is destroyed so that your fellowship is broken. You're lighting up one sin from an old one. That kind of bitterness leads either to mental attitude sins such as vindictiveness or revenge. And that revenge may be where you ream a person out, or you cool them with silence. Or the mental attitude sin may be an unforgiving spirit, or there are any number of other ways that these mental attitude sins may be expressed.

1. **Avoid Confession to Other People**

Remembering one's confessed sins also may lead you to want to discuss your evils with other people. Many churches actually encourage this. Preachers find that they can get a very interesting meeting going by encouraging people to make public confessions of their evil acts. You may be doing this in order to seek sympathy and encouragement that you are now justified. You just want to tell somebody about your evil so that they'll say, "Well, that was too bad, that was so-and-so's fault," so they give you comfort. Your negative volition attitude may drive you to seek some kind of psychological release through the substitute of confessing to people instead of to God.

1. **Avoid Public Confession**

Sometimes people want to stand up in public, and just put all their dirty linen out there. But that violates the principle that God has forgiven, and God has forgotten. When you get up and start portraying your sins in public, you have violated your own privacy, and you have contaminated other people. You create the condition for gossip. You create the condition for things that cause evils to arise in others because of the information you gave them. So, this business of standing and seeking release by confessing to others is a satanic notion. There are some powerful so-called Bible teachers who are telling people to do just exactly that. As a matter of fact, there have been whole cults which have been built upon the fact that people gathered in every service and, one-by-one, they stood up, and they felt that the only way they could release themselves with God was by telling people what they had been thinking, and what they had been doing, and laying out all of their evils. Well, undoubtedly, those were fascinating services to attend. You got the whole hot scoop every Sunday. However, it has also been demonstrated that they were extremely debilitating and degrading to people spiritually.

So, this is a serious matter when you do not accept God's principle that forgiveness is forgotten sin.

1. **Avoid Speaking about another Person's Sin**

You may not want to forgive the sins about yourself, so we have to bring up another point. You may be more interested in bringing up the sins about other people. You may like to bring up the sins of other people whether they have confessed or not, or whether it's even a sin or not. If a Christian has confessed a sin, that sin can never again be mentioned either by God or by man. When it's forgiven, it's forgotten. Once it's confessed, it is gone. You cannot mention it, and God cannot mention it. If a Christian has not confessed a sin (which you would not know whether he has or not), it's still his personal problem within his personal priesthood. You can't discuss it without sinning yourself. If you proceed to invade his privacy, you have stepped across a line that God has forbidden you to enter. It was his personal life, and his dealing with God as his own priest.

This kind of speaking about another person's sins falls under condemnation because it comes into the category of passing judgments, which is taking over a prerogative that belongs to God, and to God alone. In Romans 12:19, this principle is stated: "Dearly beloved, don't avenge yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay,' says the Lord."

Within an organizational structure such as a local church, there does reside the pattern of responsibility of those in various positions of leadership who are to live lives which are compatible to the principles of Scripture. Therefore, we have also the discipline area that lies within a local congregation which must be exercised toward those who willfully and deliberately, in public knowledge, violate the principles of the Word of God. This is true of those who are in positions of leadership, and this is true of those who are members of the congregation. The congregation may take action accordingly, and is responsible to do so. Any Christian organization has a responsibility before God to say, "These are our objectives. Therefore, here are the ground rules by which we must function to reach that objective. Therefore, as long as you are a member of this team, we expect you to conform yourself to these guidelines." That is perfectly legitimate. Every organization of the world does that in order to reach its objectives. This is perfectly biblical for Christian organizations to do as well.

However, when you're dealing with a person individually, one person to another, what he is doing with his life is a matter that is between him and the Lord. You are not to seek to exercise God's vengeance upon him. This does not preclude your warning; your exhortation; or, your admonition. Just don't try to use the whip. Just don't try to be the executer of God's judgments. At that point, you have stepped out of line. Reminding a person of his sins, whether they're real or not, is motivated by the desire for vengeance, or out of some sense of self-righteousness. And that is sin because the Bible forbids it.

In Luke 6:37, we have this principle: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemned not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven." Do not try to be the Lord's whip on anybody. The sin-caller, the Bible says, is usually guilty of the same things, mentally or overtly, that he is attacking someone else for. He is trying to find some relief in the company of others. In Romans 2:1, the apostle Paul has observed this fact when he says, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever judges, for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you that judge do the same things." So, the Bible doctrine principle is this: *Live, and let live.* Leave judgment and discipline of the Lord. You better believe it too. Live, and let live, and leave the execution of punishment to the Lord. It is not your place to try to bring punishment upon other believers to exercise divine vengeance. God doesn't need or want your help.

Instead, our attitude is to be that which is stated in Galatians 6:1. That is an attitude of grace toward a sinning Christian: to seek his restoration to fellowship with minimum injury to himself and those around him. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual (not those of you who are out of the inner circle, but those of you who are in the inner circle of spirituality) restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." So, shut your mouth about what other people do. When people are being injured by sin, they need to be helped out of it with your prayer; with your sympathy; and, with your advisement, but they do not need your public discussion or your private discussion of their problem. When believers are hurting, they need to be upheld before the Lord for healing, not for your discussing and for your analyzing. That doesn't help them, and it doesn't help you.

So, do not run down; expose; slander; or, rant against the Christian out of fellowship. This does not mean that you do not have the discernment to know that the person has a problem. Obviously, if we've got some Christian who is always stealing, we probably shouldn't make him the church treasurer. We should have the discernment that this man has a problem, and we probably shouldn't make him church treasurer. But how to deal with the issue, again, is something else. It does not exclude discernment. Just remember your own faults and your own failures, and it will help to give you perspective on these matters.

1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Wherefore, let him that thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall." An attitude of grace is not a compromise of your convictions, nor is it a justification of evil. It is just a recognition that God has to deal with these matters. If you're the victim of somebody's slanderous tongue, then you must forgive immediately, and you must turn it over to the Lord. Colossians 3:13 declares, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man has a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also, you forgive." If you're the victim of someone's ill treatment and sin, forgive immediately. Your forgiving and forgetting is not dependent on whether that person has come to ask your forgiveness either. Nor is it dependent upon whether they have squared themselves with the Lord. You don't go to somebody and say, "Have you confessed this to the Lord? OK, then I'll forgive you too." The Bible says that whatever they do to you, forgive them: "I'm not going to hold it against you. You were wrong. You should not have done this. I will not move in a spirit of bitterness. I'm going to leave it with the Lord." You straight yourself out with the Lord. That's where your problem lies, because only He can resolve it for you. You operate from the attitude of seeking to maintain all-around, for yourself and for others, fellowship in Christ.

James 5:19-20 declared this for us: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, change your mind about it. Let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sin." That's what we're to do. We're to try to help a person to see that this is not good that he's doing – that this is evil. We're to try to change his mind, and to turn him around. The Bible says, "You might save him from physical death, because he won't go to the point of the third stage of discipline – of sin unto death." You will certainly hide a multitude of sins, because if he persists in it, it will become worse. He will go deeper. He will become more corrupt. The sewage will begin to flow more widely from his life.

Operate on the attitude of restoring a person to fellowship in Christ, but don't try to exercise divine vengeance. Steer clear of the Christian who talks about others, lest he absorb you in their problem, and it destroys your frame of reference, leading you into sin. It is a dangerous thing to stand around and listen to the slanderous tongues of Christians who are talking about other people. Steer clear of those people. They will make you part of a problem that you don't have to become part of.

**The Threefold Discipline**

This bringing up the sins of other people is very serious, because the Bible tells us that what you do, in effect, when you bring up the sins of others, is that you bring upon find yourself a threefold discipline.

1. **A Mental Attitude Sin**

First, when you talk about the evils of other people, and when you gossip or slander about what other people have done, what you have done is expressed a mental attitude sin. Your action of attacking somebody else is the result of a mental attitude evil that you have. So, first of all, God punishes you for your mental attitude sin. That's the first whammy. You are disciplined with whammy number one. God just goes "Wham." You wake up, you back off, and you don't go any further. This mental attitude sin, before it has expressed itself in an overt action, is there, so there's discipline for that. Don't forget that there is discipline for mental attitude sins.

1. **Gossip**

Secondly, that mental attitude sin then expresses itself in outward slander – in some gossip of some kind. So God hits you with the second whammy. Now you have a double whammy discipline. At that point, you could back off.

1. **Judgment Brings Guilt of the Other Person's Sin**

But if you don't back of, then the third (and the worst) comes up. That's recorded for us in Matthew 7:1-2. The third step is for you to attack; for you to apply some vengeance of your own; and, for you to take the discipline into your own hands. Matthew 7:1-2: "Do no judge so that you won't be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you measure, it shall be measure to you again."

Here's what this is saying. "What judgment" is the sin that you are judging in another. "What judgment you judge" is that particular sin that you're bringing under attack. You shall be judged. You are judged for attacking that sin in another. With what judgment you judge, you will be judged by God. You've made yourself guilty of the very thing that they have been guilty of. You have entered their sin by that act. God says, "Do you want to exercise your attack on other believers, even when that believer maybe does need My vengeance? Fine. Now you've become part of his problem, and I include you in the condition of evil under which he has coming under my condemnation."

And with what measure you judge, the call for discipline is made by the fact that we're bringing up another sin. You're attacking. You're bringing up the call for discipline. You're going to exercise the vengeance. God says, "It shall be measured to you. You yourself receive the discipline that's due for that sin." There is the third whammy.

This is really crazy for anybody to do this, because what this verse is saying is that if you exercise vengeance against the person, then the discipline that he deserves will be measured to you. The discipline you measured will be measured to you.

Remember David: In his sin of adultery, when the prophet came to him, and called for the judgment that should be exercised, David came through with a big judgment and a big declarative sentence for taking that one lost sheep – the one lone sheep that the man had. Then the principle of Matthew 7:2 came into play. The Lord said, "The judgment you have measured out is the one that will be measured to you." He had entered into the third whammy stage.

This does not free the person who is guilty of the discipline. You just join him in his discipline. So, here is a triple whammy discipline that God provides for those who insist on dealing with the sins of other people, and acting as the arm of divine vengeance. Your mental attitude has brought you under divine discipline. The open expression of that mental attitude and has brought you under divine discipline. The punishment which you've applied is reversed, and applied to you as well.

Let's close with a little arithmetic in order to summarize this concept of divine discipline, and what is behind the admonition of the Laodiceans – the imperative to repent: to turn around, and to back off:

* **Formula Number 1:**

Sin plus confession equals no discipline.

* **Formula Number 2:**

Sin minus confession equals discipline.

* **Formula Number 3:**

Sin plus confession plus sin equals discipline.

* **Formula Number 4:**

Sin plus discipline plus confession equals blessing.

* **Formula Number 5:**

Sin plus sin plus sin minus confession equals the discipline of death.

That puts it all together. You can pick yourself a formula, and you apply one of them to yourself. You can take any one that you want, but God will act upon the formula you choose.

It is a serious matter to try to take over God's job of divine discipline. It is the point of wisdom to permit Him to do it, and to permit yourself to be the agent of healing rather than the agent of divine vengeance.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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