

Session 5 How the Lord Feels about a Believer: 7 Principles

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Session five. We're talking about the gospel of grace. Father, we thank You in the name of Jesus for this glorious truth of who You are and how You feel and what that does to our heart when we understand the way You feel. Holy Spirit, we ask You to let us see what You see and feel what You feel about the heart of the Father and the Son towards the Church, and we thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now in my opinion this is one of the most important subjects we need to be established in. It's not just the legal truth of who we are in Christ. We've been focusing on that in the last few sessions, but we need to take a look at the relational and the emotional implications of that legal truth.

Now if you're not yet discipling young believers, you will one day, and hopefully soon. I encourage everyone to find some believers that are newer in the Lord than you are, four, five, or six of them, and get them together and meet on a regular basis and talk to them about the things of the kingdom. Anyway, if they can get established in this subject, they'll run to the Lord with confidence even when they stumble instead of running from the Lord with condemnation.

And when we run to the Lord after we have stumbled, with an open spirit, with confidence that God enjoys us, beloved, that will change your spiritual life dramatically. The enemy wants to confuse the subject. He wants you to run from the Lord, without confidence that God receives your repentance, that the blood of Jesus is sufficient, and that the heart of God burns with desire for His people. The devil wants us to run from the Lord, close our heart, and go hide out and place ourselves on spiritual probation for a few months before we recover our boldness.

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENT ON THE GRACE OF GOD

We've been going through the gospel of grace, the message of grace, and there are two main passages to which I've drawn attention in Romans 3-8. This gives us the most comprehensive description of who we are in Christ: Romans 3-8. And we'll look at more of that in the weeks ahead.

However, Matthew 5, 6 and 7, the Sermon on the Mount, is the most comprehensive statement on how we're to respond to the grace of God. And so, Romans 3-8 is the grace that's available to us because of who we are in Christ. And the Sermon on the Mount is how we're to respond to the gospel of grace. Those are the two most comprehensive sections of scripture passages that lay out the whole subject.

Now here's the key: whether we're reading Romans 3-8, which is about our legal position, who we are in Christ, or the Sermon on the Mount, how we're to respond to the grace of God, we'll only do it in the way the Lord desires if we do it through the lens of the first commandment. It's all about love. Our legal position is more than just facts; it's about love. It's the way He loves us and the way He wants to awaken love. And when we study the gospel of grace through the lens of the first commandment, then we understand it in the way that it needs to be understood.

I've heard many people teach on grace or on the Sermon on the Mount, the response to grace, and they don't do it with the lens of the first commandment, and they end up getting distorted in their view of grace or even the response to grace. It's about love being released to us and then flowing from our heart back to Him.

GOD ENJOYS YOU AS A SINCERE BELIEVER IN CHRIST JESUS

Paragraph A. Again, this most glorious truth will change your life. It's the reality that God enjoys you. Now the *you* I'm talking about is the sincere believer in Christ Jesus. I'm not talking about a mature believer; I'm talking about a sincere believer. God actually enjoys us during the process of spiritual maturity. He doesn't only enjoy us after we mature; He actually enjoys us each step of the way.

And what He wants is for us to enjoy Him enjoying us. He wants us to enjoy the relationship. It's not an issue of gritting our teeth and paying the price to interact with a boring God. No, we don't pay the price.

THE JOY OF A HEART THAT IS TRULY ALIVE

Now Jesus in Luke 14 talked about counting the cost and paying the price, but He was talking about people who were coming into the kingdom who didn't understand how glorious He is. However, when we understand who He is, beloved, it's not about paying a price to endure relationship with Him. Then the paradigm shifts: it's an issue of our heart being fascinated. It's our heart being invigorated in the love of God with a vibrant spirit.

Now again, many people believe that God enjoys us maybe after we mature. But then if you push Him, when do you mature? And when is maturity enough to where God actually starts enjoying the relationship? I've pushed people on questions like that, and it makes some people really uncomfortable. And what they end up with is this idea that only when they're more mature than Paul the apostle does it actually work. And so functionally it never becomes a reality in their life.

THE PRIMARY EMOTIONAL NEED OF EVERY HUMAN BEING

Paragraph B. The assurance that God enjoys us, I believe, is the primary emotional need of every single human being. God designed our human spirit with longings, and I believe the most powerful and fundamental longing of the human heart is the assurance that we're enjoyed by God. Now there's only one way that we can find that, and that's through Jesus and what the Word of God says about our relationship with Jesus in the grace of God.

Now some people—many, in fact—have this very distorted idea that humility means feeling unsure about the relationship with God. They think if they're miserable and never confident, somehow that's humble. That's not humble, that's confusion, and I don't say that to be mean. God isn't honored or blessed if we suffer and sit on the sidelines in the uncertainty of how He feels about us. That doesn't honor Him; that's not what He's after. God is a father wanting to enjoy relationship with His children and Jesus is a bridegroom wanting to enjoy a deep partnership with His eternal companion.

DON'T MISTAKE YOUR WEAK LOVE WITH FALSE LOVE

Now notice two things here in paragraph C. When we have confidence that God enjoys us, again, based on the truth of who Jesus is and what He did on the cross, that's when our heart is empowered the most. However, it's not enough that God loves us; there's a response. We have to have confidence when we respond in love back that God actually honors and receives that response.

You see, some believers have a technical knowledge that God loves them, but when it comes to responding in love, they believe their love is so bad, so broken, so weak, that God despises their response.

Well, I have good news for you: when we love Him back, even in our weakness, God receives it. He enjoys it. Because our love is weak; our love is flawed. But just because it's weak love doesn't mean it's false love. When we return love, though it's weak and flawed, it's still real and it moves God's heart. And when we have confidence that He enjoys us and, number two, that He receives our response back as genuine even when we're weak, that does something to our relationship with God. It completely transforms the way we view our relationship with God.

THE EXHILARATION OF A HEART THAT LOVES AND IS LOVED

Paragraph C. Now some people are afraid of this truth. I've spoken this over the years and I know different leaders who get nervous about this. They say, "Wait a second: if you get people really confident in the love of God, they'll become careless in their walk with God."

And I believe it has the exact opposite effect. I believe that when people become confident in God's love towards them and confident that God receives their love as genuine, when we become confident in that confidence, it invigorates and empowers our heart in a very dramatic way. It doesn't make us careless: "Well, God loves me and He knows I love Him, so who cares!"

It touches the deepest longing of our being. There's nothing more satisfying than having confidence in that exchange with God's heart. I mean, it gives us a reason to live beyond any other reason. It gives our life meaning and purpose, and it satisfies our human spirit like nothing else.

Here's what condemnation is: it's that feeling of shame that persists even after we've repented. We've repented but we still feel the shame. We've repented of our sin and the Lord has cleansed us. The Lord has received us, but we have this shame, this condemnation, and it makes us close our hearts even while we're worshipping God.

Many people, when they worship the Lord, have these wrong ideas. They're engaging with their minds, but their hearts are closed. They're protecting themselves even while they're worshipping. And they're saying, "I love You, God. I love You. Please, just give me one more chance. You're magnificent; You're glorious. I'll never do it again if You forgive me one more time." And they don't have an open spirit and they can't receive from the Lord in that kind of posture.

DON'T MISTAKE GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS APPROVAL

Paragraph D. Now God loves everyone. He loves unbelievers. He even blesses unbelievers. He loves and blesses unbelievers who rebel against Him. It says in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16). I mean, He loves the unbelieving world; He does, deeply. He causes the sunshine and the rain to bless evil men (Mt. 5:45). He blesses evil men. He loves evil men, but don't mistake His blessing on evil men as His approval of them or His acceptance of a relationship with them. He loves and blesses evil men who resist Him and He gives them a season to come to Him, a season that may last for decades. But don't mistake the idea that God loves them and blesses them with the idea that God approves of the relationship, or how they're responding to Him. Romans 5:10 says they're enemies of God; they're at enmity with Him. They're declaring war on His leadership over their life; they're saying "No!" And because He blesses them and loves them, sometimes they

get comfortable in a wrong way with not having a relationship with Jesus, and they mistake His blessing with approval.

HOW DOES GOD FEEL ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU SIN?

Paragraph E. This is the question of the hour, and you have to answer this question in a biblical way to grow in the most optimal way in your spiritual life. Here's the question: how does God feel about you when you sin? You need to be able to answer that question with clarity in your heart. Not that we know the whole answer in fullness, but the Bible makes it clear how God feels about sincere believers. I'm talking about sincere believers here the whole time: when we sin, when we come up short, when we stumble.

GOD HAS A HAPPY DISPOSITION TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE

Now God has different emotions based on our response. God's emotions are related to our response to Him. Now many people—many believers—live confused on this subject. They can never tell for certain whether God is mad, sad, or glad. They love God but they don't quite know what mood He's in.

I love that saying you've heard: "I have good news: God is in a good mood." God has a happy disposition towards His people.

Now just to go over this really briefly—and I summarize it on the last page, but you know, we never get to the last page. That's OK because that's why we have it there, and you can read it on your own. He's angry with the rebellious—with unbelievers. He's actually angry because they refuse His kindness as He has been wooing them. And there are different measures of His anger. He's grieved at believers whom He loves who persistently resist His leadership. However, He enjoys sincere believers even in their weakness.

Most of you in this room, and hopefully all of you, are sincere believers. We all have weakness and immaturity in our spiritual life, but the revelation is that God isn't perpetually sad about His relationship with you. And there's this idea some people have that if we're sad because God is sad, that's called humility. No, the good news is that if you're a sincere believer He's actually glad and enjoys the relationship, and we can enjoy Him enjoying the relationship.

THE GOODNESS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER TOWARDS IMMATURE CHILDREN

Paragraph F. Again, some think God only enjoys them after they're more mature than Paul the apostle. They think He waits until they're really mature, and they don't know when that mysterious moment is when God actually starts smiling at them. They kind of imagine that He's mad most of the time, and then when things get a little better, He's not mad; He's just sad. When He thinks about them, He says, "Ahh, that boy! I love you but you sure break My heart all the time." And so He's not mad but He lives in a perpetual sadness when He thinks of them. Many believers camp out in one of those two mindsets. They imagine that for their whole spiritual life, for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, He was sad the whole time. And they're seeking Him with all of their heart because they have weakness and failure.

Beloved, I have good news: God really is glad in His disposition towards His people even in our weakness. Look at what Jesus said in Luke 11. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Lk. 11:13)! You're evil but you know how to give good to immature children. How much more does your heavenly Father know how to give good? If we can enjoy our five-year-old children who are immature, if we can enjoy the relationship with

our children even though they have immaturity and areas of disobedience and areas they aren't refined in, but we enjoy the relationship, and if we're evil—meaning we don't have the goodness of God in and of ourselves, because He imparts that through the grace of God, that ability to have emotions like His—if we can enjoy our immature children as fallen people, how much more can God, who is the very fountain of love, enjoy His children?

Some folks have this idea that we can enjoy our immature children because we can sort through the issues, but somehow God can't. And so without really saying it, our perspective in love is superior to His because we can sort throughout the issues with our children and we say, "Hey, I love the relationship; I love the little guy. Those one or two areas we'll confront and change."

We can sort through the issues. But when it comes to our heavenly Father, we don't imagine He can do that at the same level that we can. Well, obviously He can, much more than we can. How much more does your heavenly Father have goodness towards His immature children?

"THE SPIRIT INDEED IS WILLING, BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK"

Paragraph G. Now when the twelve apostles were in the garden of Gethsemane with Jesus, He called them to pray. He said, "You had better be talking to God right now because you're all going to deny Me." But He also spoke these words of affirmation: "Your spirit is willing" (Mt. 26:41, paraphrased). That's remarkable. He said, "Peter, I see in your spirit a willingness to be courageous and obey Me. The problem is, Peter, your flesh is weak, and when the intense situation comes, fear is going to overtake you. But I want you to know, I see your spirit. There's a yes in your spirit, Peter, that even you don't see."

Because when Peter stumbled and yielded to his weak flesh, it was such a crisis that I believe he was tempted just to give up on the whole thing. Because all he could see was his weak flesh. But the good news is that the Lord doesn't only see our weak flesh, although He does see it. He sees the yes in our spirit, a willing spirit.

Now we typically are aware of our willing spirit until we stumble, and then the conversation shifts dramatically to the other side, and we become so aware of our weak flesh, we lose sight of the fact that in the grace of God we do have a yes in our spirit to God and it actually moves Him. Then we get over the trauma of our sin and failure and we kind of forget about it. Then sometimes we overemphasize our willing spirit and we get confidence in our dedication spirit, and we think we're doing well. Then we stumble again and we say, "Oh no! What a crisis!" Then, "Woe is me; I want to quit! What's the use? My flesh is so weak!"

However, the Lord says, "When you discover the weakness of your flesh, I didn't discover it just because you did. It might be new to you, but it's not new to Me," the Lord could say.

SINCERITY: THE SETTING OF THE HEART TO OBEY

I remember as a young believer in my teens, I had many sins, but I would say this to the Lord: "Oh no! I can't believe I did this! Can You believe it?"

You know, I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, and in the anguish of my sin and failure I said, "Can You believe it?"

I wasn't asking a real question but I just blurted that out a few times. And I imagine if the Lord was answering out loud, He would have said, "Yes, I can, and there's a whole lot more where that came from. But I see something more than your weak flesh; I see a willing spirit."

Now I define sincerity as setting the intention of our heart to obey. We determine to obey, and then when we fail we don't rationalize it. When we sin we don't say, "Well, there's a Bible verse that might back it up; maybe it wasn't that bad." No, we call sin, *sin*, at whatever level of thought, word, or deed, whatever level we're dealing with. We don't rationalize our sin; we call it what it is, and we enter back into war against it. We determine we'll resist it. We may fail the next day; we may fail that day. Every time we fail, we admit it, and we declare war on it and we resist it and we converse with the Lord with the intention to obey Him. And we may fail many, many, many more times.

In time you'll get the victory if you stay with it, but here's the good news: the Lord actually enjoys the relationship even before you get the full victory. Because the good news is this: when you admit it's sin and declare war on it, that's the beginning of victory. Some people imagine that victory is only victory when it's the fullness of maturity. Beloved, when you say yes to God and declare war on the sin you committed three times today, you immediately say, "Lord, I really want this to go away. I'm not trying to think of ways to get away with my sin; I'm trying to think of ways to get free from it."

That's the dream of your heart: you're trying to find a way to get free of it, not to get away with it. Beloved, that's the beginning of victory. Victory is already working in you. Victory isn't only the fullness of liberty where you never stumble again in that area. I mean, that's a greater stage of victory, but victory begins long before that stage.

We'll look at these seven principles ever so briefly, because they really are pretty self-explanatory. However, my aim is for you to get these seven key ideas, these seven principles, so that you'll have enough confidence to run to Him instead of from Him, and you won't have condemnation shutting your heart down.

Again, condemnation is that shameful feeling after you've already repented and the Lord has already cleansed you. The devil stays around and whispers, "You aren't really cleansed; you aren't forgiven. It's still hindering the relationship, that sin you committed yesterday."

DON'T CONFUSE IMMATURITY WITH REBELLION

Principle number one: spiritual immaturity is not the same thing as rebellion. Now sometimes there's a rebellious person who doesn't care about his or her relationship with the Lord; they're rebellious towards God and an unbeliever. They couldn't care less, and outwardly they look like an unbeliever. I mean, the outward behavior is the same in that particular issue.

And without any discernment you might look at them and say, "Well, you just did what the unbeliever did. Bah, humbug! Away with you!" But the issue is that the sincere believer has a very different heart response to the failure.

Now people say, "I don't want to be a hypocrite," and that's good, but a hypocrite isn't someone who says one thing and does another. That's not what a hypocrite is. You've heard that saying, "A hypocrite says one thing and does another." No, a hypocrite is someone who says something and doesn't seek to obey it. I mean, we all

say things that we don't live in fullness. We all make statements about our intention to love God and obey Him, and we come up short. We aren't hypocrites because we come up short of what we say. We're hypocrites if we aren't seeking to walk in the things that we say.

And so you can have confidence in your walk with God even when you're coming up short, because when you come up short, you recommit yourself to obey. And you recommit yourself to be engaged in a war against that issue in your life, and every single time you come up short. Confess it to the Lord; don't confess the same sin a hundred times, because you don't have to. Thank Him for His full cleansing. Stand in the presence of God as a first-class citizen, within the minute. That's a little rough on the emotions, because our un-renewed mind wants us to be driven from God's presence. However, because of the truth of who you are in Christ, you have every right to stand there as a first-class citizen, mere moments after you repent.

Now there's war in our mind. Until our mind is renewed and agrees with the Word, we believe lies about how God views us, so we want to run from His presence, like Adam did back in Genesis 3. He ran from His presence to hide from God, like that was going to get him somewhere.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHEEP AND SWINE

Paragraph B. Now I think of two animals, the sheep and the swine, or the pigs. In the Old Testament one was a clean animal, the sheep, and one was the unclean animal, the swine. They both get stuck in the mud, but they have a very different reaction when they get stuck in the mud. You get a pig out of the mud and within the minute they're looking for another mud hole. However, the sheep are very different. They're stuck in the mud and they're kicking to get out of it and they can't get out but they're fighting, they're kicking, and they're trying to find a way out. They aren't looking for another mud hole; they're trying to get out and their feet are stuck. And the Lord sees their response very differently.

THE SETTING OF THE HEART TO OBEY IS THE BEGINNING OF VICTORY

Paragraph C. Our love is sincere even when it's weak and flawed. Weak love isn't false love. The intention to obey matters to God; the attainment comes later. Now we want to walk in the attainment of full obedience, but that attainment, that victory of full attainment begins with the intention. I made that statement a moment ago: the setting of the heart to obey, that's the beginning of victory.

The enemy wants to cancel us out when our spirit is willing. There's a yes in our spirit, but our flesh is weak. The enemy wants us to give up and run from God and go hide, to put ourselves on spiritual probation.

“HE DELIVERED ME BECAUSE HE DELIGHTED IN ME”

Principle number two. God enjoys sincere yet weak believers. I've already made that point but one of the great examples in the word is King David. I love Psalm 18:19, where David prayed this prayer. He said “God delivered me,” and then he gives the most amazing reason why God delivered him. He said, “Because He likes me; He delights in me” (Ps. 18:19, paraphrased).

Now to understand the power of Psalm 18, you have to understand the context in which He wrote it. You open your Bibles to Psalm 18 and you see at the very top it says, “This psalm was written on the day that God delivered David out of the hands of his enemies” (Ps. 18:1, paraphrased). And when you read it, it becomes clear how David is responding on the day that God delivered him from King Saul who was trying to kill him for about six or seven years. The jealous king had been pursuing David for six or seven years, trying to kill him.

And on this one day Saul died in battle and David was liberated from his enemy, but the part of the story that's critical to understand this psalm is what David had been doing for the sixteen months leading up to the day that Saul died and he was delivered.

I don't want to go into the details now, but I'll say this: David was living in a city called *Ziklag* for sixteen months, but here's the point: he was living in that city in compromise. I'm not going to break that down right now. I have that written in some different books and you can find it on the website if you want to search that out. It's a glorious truth.

And so David had been sixteen months in compromise and King Saul was trying to kill him, and God removed King Saul, and on the day that that happened David stands up and says, "I'm delivered!"

I imagine a reporter says, "Why did God deliver you? We want to interview you, young King David."

"Well, I'll tell you why God delivered me: He liked me the whole time! That's why He delivered me."

One of David's mighty men might have said, "David, have you forgotten that for the last sixteen months there has been an element of compromise in your life?"

"Yes, but you know what? I repented yesterday. And God delights in me and I'm going with that!"

Beloved, it's remarkable that after his sixteen months in *Ziklag*, in compromise, he repented, and the favor of God came on him (1 Sam. 30). God delivered him, and David had the insight to say, "The reason He delivered me is because He likes me."

Now here's what we do: we would go hide away somewhere and build up our spiritual muscles for six months to a year, and then be bold before the Lord. But within twenty-four hours, David said, "I'm back in business. I repented of it. The favor of God is on me. I know what He's like. He likes me and that's why He delivered me."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAUL AND DAVID

Paragraph B. It's important to know that. I've studied David's life pretty energetically over the years. One time I gave a message where I highlighted ten sins of David that are in 1 and 2 Samuel. I mean, when you see all ten of them in a row it was so bad, they were considering censoring David in the children's church. I'm joking!

But I remember I laid out ten of them and the congregation said, "Wow! You know what? I'm not sure about that guy." Because when you put them all in a row it looked like David sinned more than Saul did. Well, what's the difference? Because God looked at David and restored him quickly, and looked at Saul and rejected him!

Here's the difference: when David sinned, his heart was wounded because he grieved God's heart. He cared more about his relationship with God than the consequences of getting caught. When Saul sinned, he cared more about getting caught, not about offending God's heart. That's the difference.

Paragraph C. David understood this revelation that God delights in mercy. He actually likes it. God doesn't endure giving us mercy; He actually likes giving us mercy. That's an insight into His personality.

A GOD WHO HAS KINDNESS AND COMPASSION TOWARDS HIS CHILDREN

Paragraph D. The famous parable of the Prodigal Son. Here's the question I want to highlight: when does God enjoy the Prodigal Son? We know the story in Luke 15: the young man takes the father's inheritance and wastes it all on sinful living and comes back to his father.

Now here's the remarkable part of the story, because this is very important: Jesus is revealing what the Father is like. And the Pharisees don't like this parable because Jesus portrayed God as so tender, kind, and loving towards His children.

In verse 18, when the Prodigal Son said, "I have sinned" (Lk. 15:18), immediately the father receives him. He hasn't even had a chance to prove he's sincere. He still had the unsettled issues in his life, but literally, that very day when he returned, even though he still had these problems in his life, he had changed his heart attitude. All he had done was repented. He hadn't even cleaned up yet. He hadn't gone through the twelve-step healing course. His life was still a wreck in his emotions and some of the things he was doing, but he changed his attitude and called sin, *sin*, and said, "I will war against it."

Look what happened in verse 20: the father when he saw this felt compassion, ran towards him, fell on his neck—embraced him—and kissed him (Lk. 15:20). Then he called for the best robe to be brought out!

Now the elder brother said, "Wait a second, Dad. He only repented twelve hours ago. Let's put him on the back row for a while and see how this pans out. And if it turns out OK in the next couple of years then let's have a fellowship meal to celebrate his recovery."

The father says, "No, we aren't going to wait a couple of years; we'll do it today." I mean, it's hours later. The father runs after him, embraces him, and kisses him. And what Jesus is talking about is God, the Father, relating to people. That's the message.

In verse 22, he gave him the best robe. "Wait!" says the elder brother. "You can't give him that robe today, that sign of favor. Wait for a few years."

But the very day he returns, the father immediately reinstates him into a relationship where he's enjoying his son. That's the point. Well, there are actually many points but that's the only one we're looking at now.

HIS MERCIES ARE NEW EVERY MORNING

Paragraph E. His mercies are new every single morning (Lam. 3:22-23). Beloved, no matter what you do today you can repent of it sincerely, cry out to God, and declare war on it. And you know whether you're being real or not. Again, the plan of our heart is figuring out how to get free from the sin, not how to cover the sin up. You can have a new beginning every single day. Every single morning is a new beginning if you have the understanding to take it.

"AS MANY AS I LOVE, I REBUKE AND CHASTEN; BE ZEALOUS, THEREFORE, AND REPENT"
Now, lest we misunderstand, God's enjoyment of us isn't the same thing as His approval of everything we do. God enjoys the relationship with the sincere believer, but He doesn't approve everything that sincere believer does. Look at what Jesus said in Revelation 3:19; there's no contradiction in these five words here. He says, "I love you; therefore I'm rebuking you for the area in your life that's wrong. And I'm not just rebuking you, I will

discipline you. Now what I want you to do is to be zealous, to be aggressive in your relationship with Me. And I want you to repent of your passivity and your compromise, but know this: I love you. I want you zealous; therefore I will discipline you” (Rev. 3:19, paraphrased).

And so some people get the idea that if God loves us, all is well. Sometimes it’s a very different story: because He loves us, He’s going to press in on that issue that’s hindering our ability to walk in the relationship in fullness. He wants us zealous, wholehearted, but while we’re repenting, He loves us every step of the way. He actually enjoys us every step of the way.

DISCIPLINE IS AN INDICATION OF HIS COMMITMENT TO THE RELATIONSHIP

Paragraph B. Now, Jezebel was a mess! And Jesus says, “I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality” (Rev. 2:21). Beloved, He gave Jezebel time to repent. Here’s my point: many times God will give us time to repent, and because He gives us time, don’t interpret His patience as His approval on that one issue of your life.

There’s an issue. We know it’s wrong and we’re warring against it, but we aren’t getting the breakthrough. And the Lord says, “I love you. I even enjoy My relationship with you, but I have My finger on that issue. I know you’re warring against it, but now I’m going to help you, because the breakthrough isn’t coming. It’s called discipline.

“And I’m not going to discipline you because I’ve cast you aside. On the contrary, I’m going to discipline you because I’m so committed to our relationship and I have great plans for it.”

Now some people will be trapped in something for a few months, and even a few years, and they say, “Well, it doesn’t seem to cause any problems. I mean, everything seems OK.”

And the Lord might say, “Don’t take God’s patience for granted and mistake His patience with His approval. His patience is given to woo us to repent.”

DON’T MISTAKE GOD’S CORRECTION WITH REJECTION

Paragraph C. Romans 2. Here’s the problem Paul highlights. He says, “Don’t despise the riches of God’s forbearance” (Rom. 2:4, paraphrased)—which means *patience*. He says, “Don’t you know that God’s patience is meant to woo you to repent and be wholehearted? Don’t take His patience and despise it. Be grateful for it. Let it woo you to repentance.”

Roman numeral V. Principle number four. When God corrects us, He’s not rejecting us. As a matter of fact, His correction is proof of His love.

Paragraph C. Here’s David again: God doesn’t discipline us to the degree that we deserve. David was under divine discipline a few times, and he said this having come through it all. He says, “At the end of the day He didn’t deal with me according to some of the things I was resisting Him on. He was far kinder in the process than I deserved.”

Now again, the issue wasn’t David going to heaven or hell. God wanted to remove the issue out of David’s life at various times in his life, because the Lord enjoyed the relationship with David. Now the enemy will come

along and tell us that God's correction is rejection, and it's not. He hasn't lost interest in the relationship. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite.

DISCIPLINE IS A SIGN THAT GOD HASN'T GIVEN UP ON YOU YET

Paragraph D. To be disciplined by God means God hasn't given up on the relationship. I tell you, when the trouble comes, if you get away with something for a long time, that's not good. That's a terrible thing when the Lord says, "OK, you can have your way then." That's really bad! We don't want our way. The Bible calls that God giving them over to what they want (Rom. 1:24-26).

While He's disciplining us He's declaring His commitment to the relationship. And so when we're under a season of discipline, someone says, "I don't know whether it's the devil attacking me or the Lord disciplining me." The Holy Spirit will make it clear to you if you ask Him. It may take more than one request, but He will make it clear to you.

Now there's a different situation. I'm not speaking now about the sincere believer who stumbles, repents, and declares war on sin, and then stumbles, repents, and declares war on sin. God allows that to go, and then eventually God breaks in and starts helping them. It's called "divine discipline," because God is so committed to the relationship.

However, there's another situation that's far more negative. It's the believer who is in persistent, known sin for a season. The Bible makes it clear that God is grieved; He's sad. He's not mad. Mad is different than sad. He's mad at rebellion. He's sad over compromise among people with whom He has a relationship.

Paragraph B. Jesus talked about these lukewarm believers. He spoke in this strong language, but we want to understand the language. He says here in Revelation 3:16, "I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). Now you might really misinterpret that. He's not saying, "I despise you." He's not saying, "I've lost interest in the relationship."

What He's saying is, "The relationship, the way you're relating to Me, hurts My stomach. It hurts Me because of all of the loss that's happening in our relationship. I love you so much that it makes My heart sick. It hurts My stomach when I see the truth of how you're responding to Me."

And so this isn't about Him despising us; it's one of the most graphic statements of grief. But He's not giving up on the relationship, because this is the very passage where He said, "I love you; therefore I will discipline you." We just looked at that passage a few moments ago.

"I HAVE GIVEN THE . . . BELOVED OF MY SOUL INTO THE HAND OF HER ENEMIES"

Paragraph C. This is a very graphic passage. In Jeremiah 12:7, God is talking to the nation of Israel when they were at the height of rebellion and compromise. He said this: "I will give you over to your enemies" (Jer. 12:7, paraphrased). He's talking about the Babylonian invasion that came in 586 BC. He said, "I will give you over because you won't listen to Me. And your rebellion is heightening, but I want you to know you're still the dearly beloved of My heart. Though I will give you over to discipline, My heart calls you My dearly beloved one."

Here's the point: when Israel repented, the Lord says, "I'm so desirous for the relationship to be in that first-class status right now, I'll take you back in the full sense if you'll just say no to your rebellion against Me."

THE LIBERATION OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Principle number six. When we're pressing into God, the grace of God calls us to respond with spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting and reading the Word.

God has ordained the spiritual disciplines, particularly in Matthew 6, not as a way to earn His favor. Discipline doesn't earn us anything. You couldn't pray or fast enough to earn the love of God. I mean, think about it. In prayer you're just telling God what He tells you to tell Him. In fasting you're skipping lunch; how could that possibly earn anything? Some people get fixated on this idea that they aren't going to do that because they don't want to earn something. Well, think it all the way through: prayer is just talking to God, having a conversation with Him. You don't earn anything by just having a conversation with someone.

What the spiritual disciplines do is position us to receive more, and to receive it freely. The analogy I've used over the years is that we put our cold heart before the bonfire of God's presence. Our heart is cold. Through prayer and the Word and worship, we're putting our cold heart before the bonfire of God, and our heart becomes tenderized. The warmth causes the frozen dimension to go away and thaw out. The power is in the bonfire, not in the discipline. Discipline doesn't earn us anything; it positions us for the bonfire to impact our hearts freely. We don't earn anything by it.

The reason I say that is because some people think that if they throw discipline into the mix, they're automatically trying to earn something. Now some people do pray and fast to earn something, but again, if you think it through all the way, you don't earn anything by just talking to God. That's a relational statement. He says, "I just want you to talk to Me, because I love you. That's the only reason I want you to pray."

HUNGER IS THE ESCORT TO THE DEEPER THINGS OF GOD

Now God gives us on the basis of hunger. He'll give us more if we're hungry for more; that's what He promised. He says, "Blessed are those who hunger for the things of God, because they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6).

Here's the reason: God honors us valuing the relationship enough to place ourselves in the place to grow in it. When we so value our relationship with Him that we do these things, then the Lord releases even greater grace because our hunger is for the relationship to get stronger. And so we enter into more experience of that which is freely offered to us.

Beloved, God doesn't love us more when we're more disciplined. Here's why: God's love is infinite and eternal. He won't love you more a million years from now than He does today. He can't love you more. He can't increase in love. He loves you perfectly and He never changes, ever. What discipline does is enable us to experience more. It doesn't cause God to love us more.

THE GOD WHO ENTRUSTS WITH FULLNESS IN RESPONSE TO COMPLETE OBEDIENCE

Principle seven. Maturity allows us to be entrusted with more. Now I'll be very brief on this. I want to bring this to an end, but this is very important because it can be a tricky one if you hear it the wrong way.

Paragraph A. God loves and anoints all of us to do the work of His kingdom. The most immature believer He loves and anoints to do the works of the kingdom. Jesus talked about talents and folds. He talked about the one man who had two talents or five talents or ten talents. Talents describe the sphere of gifting and influence that God might give you.

Now that's a sovereign determination. In your mother's womb God determines how many talents you get. The talents are the measure of your gifting and the measure of the influence He's going to give you in this life if you obey Him. Then He talks about thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold; that's our response.

Now here's the tricky part: a man with the ten talents may only have thirty-fold obedience, but he will have a much bigger impact than a man with one talent who has hundredfold obedience. And so we can get really confused if we look around, and we say, "Whoever has the biggest influence or the biggest resource must be the most obedient."

It doesn't work that way. Because a ten-talent man can have thirty-fold response of obedience and still make a much bigger impact than a one-talent man with hundredfold obedience. So don't look around and compare yourself and say, "Well, that guy must be really obedient; look how much he has!"

Now when a ten-talent man or woman has hundredfold obedience, then you get something like Paul the apostle. What happens when we obey with all of our heart? We enter into the fullness of what was ordained for us originally. I don't know how many talents I have or how many you have. It's not like there's a number and God tells us the number, but the Lord says, "If you'll obey, you'll enter into the fullness of what I ordained for you. And it might be small, but you can enter into the fullness of what I ordained, and when you stand before Me then I'll give you the full reward, above and beyond even what men would have guessed in this age."

My desire is to enter into the fullness of my ordained calling. It's not to have a bigger calling than your calling, or a smaller one. I want to fulfill my calling, whatever that assignment is, and the Lord says "If you'll obey with all of your heart, you'll enter into the fullness. I'll entrust you with all that I would have given you that I've ordained for you."

But many people respond passively, and they still get blessed. But the Lord would have given them more if they had entered in more, because He entrusts with the fullness in response to the mature obedience. However our obedience doesn't earn it, our obedience puts us in a position for God to entrust us more.

Because here's the issue: if God gave you everything He ordained for you and you weren't obedient, it would end up hurting your life. And you would end up using those resources in a way that would trouble other people's lives, because you would use the blessing with a wrong spirit. And so the Lord says, "I'll give you the fullness of what I've ordained for you when you respond to Me in the fullness of what I've called you to."

Amen. Let's stand.