

## *As Many As I Love*

*"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."*

Rev 3:19, 20

In Christ's address to the seven churches of Revelation chapters two and three, two of them are explicitly described as being loved. Clearly, God loves them all but let's focus on the two last churches, Philadelphia and Laodicea, to glean from this distinction. To preface, let's review a well known story:

"You are the man!" stated the prophet to which a deafening, awkward silence stormed into the room. Most if not all of you already know the dark episode of David's life involving secret sin and Bathsheba. You recall how he let his sexual lust lead him into adultery, deception and murder.

Nathan continued, *"Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house,*

*because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun."*

*So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."*

Just as God said, David reaped what he had sowed. For taking another man's wife, his own wives were taken by his rebellious son Absalom. For destroying another man's family, his own was thrown into the chaos of incest, murder and revolution. For his subterfuge, his own judgment was placed before all of Israel and via the scripture, before the whole world. For murdering his servant Uriah, a devoted man, three of his own children died including Bathsheba's. In addition, we could point out that as he "despised" the Lord, so he learned what it was like to be despised by his own. Whew! Very tough discipline.

And it is important to realize that these very difficult events which God determined were not the basis for David being forgiven. God forgave him the moment he acknowledged his sins and repented. The corrective discipline came afterwards, some of it years later. God said David despised Him and His commands. Was His

response because He in turn despised David? No. No way.

My boys used to say that when they had been unruly or just really blew it, all Mom had to say was, "OK, you won't listen to me... I'm just going to have to tell your father when he gets home." And that was the end – the whole day was shot. For them, the clock ticked visibly slower and slower until about six when I would pull in, and until then it was impossible to have any more fun because judgment was on its way. By the time I got there, Mom had inevitably forgiven them but correction was still important.

Like them, I'm one who wishes my Father would let His correction somehow slide cause I'm so sure that 'my bad behavior will never happen again – no Sir.' But to my 'chagrin' He hasn't read Dr. Spock. And though, in my carnality, I sometimes wish he had, I know the truth of the scripture which says, *"...the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes (spanks, if you would) everyone he accepts as a son."* Why? *"...for [our] profit, that [we] might be partakers of his holiness."*

Oh, how I sometimes wish it weren't necessary for *"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."*

God doesn't discipline His children arbitrarily or even, I'm convinced, mysteriously. This is one reason Job was so perplexed. He could say, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* But the harshness of the tragedies that befell him were never stated by the Lord to be in response to some sin in his life or intended as a

corrective chastisement.

Consequently, Job was befuddled.

Throughout scripture, we find the Lord bringing discipline, that is corrective training, to His children which directly relates to their sin, and at some point He makes it clear what He's doing. Consider the sons of Jacob standing before their betrayed brother Joseph – they knew God was involved (Gen 42:18-24), or the Jewish nation wandering in the wilderness – the Lord said, *"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you."* (Deut 8:2-5) or in the days of Jeremiah (Jer 30:14) or the periodic afflictions seen in the book of Judges (Jud 2:11-23). As with David, when God deals with us by chastisement, He wants us to know what's going on and that He's at the helm. Certainly, this is to ensure that the lesson is understood. Thus, to view all tragedy or crisis as God's discipline would be wrong. The word for chasten in the Greek means to train children or to chastise for the purpose of teaching. It is derived from the word for child or servant.

God's judgment as with the flood of Noah or the destruction of Sodom is not corrective for the individual. Also, sin itself has consequences as may be seen in the life of Samson or as when Jesus admonished the lame man He had healed at the pool of Bethesda. In addition, we must remember that we are in a fallen world and that just living a godly life therein will bring affliction as with the three Hebrews thrown into the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar. And then there are those who will simply seek to persecute the godly as with Daniel when he was placed in the lion's den. Finally, God's tests can be difficult as with dear father Abraham and his son Isaac. None of these are specifically corrective in nature though. Of course, for the godly, the Lord uses all things for His good purposes. For example, God specifically used Bathsheba to bear Solomon and Nathan – the progenitors of both Messianic lines seen in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

How then, do we know if some experience should be received as the Lord's discipline? Why should we care to know?

Whether for discipline or some other reason, nothing passes into the life of one of God's children apart from His will. Discerning discipline from the Lord is not a matter of trusting whether or not He's in control. Even unto death, nothing will touch you as a believer that is accidental or out of His control. This is one of the most difficult things for contemporary believers to accept. It requires faith that doesn't fit in many modern seminaries or sermons. It is the stuff of martyrs.

Chastisement? Part of the purpose behind it is to get us to seek Him fervently. Just as when I disciplined my own children, I told them why so they would get the point. So God does the same. There are plenty of mysteries in the ways of the Lord, but almost by definition, for corrective discipline to work in us, we must understand its reason. As you seek the Lord in the scriptures, in prayer and in godly counsel – He will let you know if He's dealing with you on something.

Corrective discipline is reserved for God's children, not His enemies. (Heb 12:6) He always disciplines us in love and for our benefit. (Heb 12:10) This is a key in our own dealings with one another as well. It's one thing to help someone 'face the facts'; it's totally another to nest corrective truth in love. So called 'tough love' can be necessary, but it can also be a callous cop out for not sincerely loving someone. It can be a convenient façade for many personal sins.

Consider the scripture, *"when we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."* Talk about corrective change! This describes the ultimate metamorphosis – becoming like Jesus. Do you suppose this is something forced upon us? I submit that this change, just like all changes He wants for our good even now, may be voluntary. It will certainly be welcomed by His children because *"we will see Him as He is."* When we see Christ, we want to change to be more like Him. The same is true now. When you recognize a truly loving heart behind the words or deeds of corrective discipline, you are drawn to repentance and change.

Now back to the two churches -- I believe that from a prophetic standpoint, the church of Philadelphia represents the group of sincere believers who will be raptured at the Lord's appearing. This is for two reasons. First, He says that He has set before them an open door. Some have said that this is an open door for ministry and missions. Historically, that seems like a good explanation and I personally support that view. However, from a prophetic standpoint, this seems to relate more directly to the 'open door' that is presented just 14 verses later at the beginning of Revelation chapter four which many scholars interpret as representing the rapture. Second, the Lord says specifically that he will keep this group *"from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."* which seems to be a clear reference to the tribulation period.

Laodicea however is rebuked and chastened. The tribulation described in the book of Revelation is both a time of judgment on a Christ-rejecting sin filled world and a chastisement upon His hard hearted Jewish children, many of whom will repent. Some say it may be a 'knocking on the door' for the 'left-behind' of Laodicea as well.

During this time, those who overcome in faith will pay with their lives because they are confident of God's love and will know there is joy set before them in heaven (See Rev 7). Jesus had this overcoming faith in the Father and knew that the chastisement He endured was for a gloriously good purpose. He says to this church, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand*

*at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."* (Rev 3:19-21)

Both churches are distinctly referred to as being loved. However, the word used pertaining to the Philadelphian church is 'agapao' akin to as we say agape love – godly love. 'Agapao' also is used in referring to espousal love and means to welcome, to entertain, to love dearly and to be well pleased which may have particular reference here to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The word for love used in reference to Laodicea is 'phileo' – the relational love of friendship. You recall that in dealing with Peter on the shore of Galilee after His resurrection, Jesus used both words in his "Do you love me?" inquiries whereas Peter used just 'phileo' in his answers. You might think of it as a love that 'likes' someone as well.

One church is applauded while the other receives chastisement and rebuke. Both are defined as churches. In the Bible this means bodies of believers, not buildings. It is certainly true that many if not most large groups of believers also have those participating in worship who do not know the Lord, but then by scriptural definition they are not part of the church.

I'm personally inclined to believe that Jesus' knocking on the door of the Laodicean church is not necessarily an indication that they are unsaved but rather an encouragement to repent of their

tepid relationship and an invitation to renew fellowship with Him. They have cooled to a lukewarm Christianity leaving Him out. Consequently, the Lord tells them to be zealous (i.e. get hot) and repent. He says they are 'talaiporos' or enduring trial, 'elehinos' or pitiable/miserable, 'ptochos' or a cringing beggar, 'tuphlos' or opaque (by analogy, blind) and 'gumnos' or naked. This is the sad condition of the cooled down Christian, the one whose spiritual life is basically set in cruise control. When Jesus tells them to obtain gold tried in the fire, He may be talking of faith that endures tribulation; when He says to obtain white robes, He may be talking of His righteousness as opposed to their own – they may be looking to Him for salvation AND to their own righteousness for good standing in the church. Without the right robes they're not ready for the wedding – (See Matt 22:11,12); when He says for them to obtain eye salve it's because they are clearly blind to their condition and to His desire for them.

To Christ, it is nauseating because He cares so much. In fact the word translated "shall" used in "shall spue or vomit" in verse 3:16 of this passage is a strengthened form of the word 'melo' meaning 'to care'. Our English word, shall, is rather definitive implying a foregone conclusion whereas the word here in the original language means "to be on the point of doing or suffering something" so it would appear that the Lord is warning them and expressing His deep, deep concern. Whether or not they are 'left behind' as some assert remains to be seen.

In any event, both churches are loved. Both are loved. Jesus says that Philadelphia is being run down by religious imposters but He loves them deeply with a holy agape love. They are 'dissed' by the religious but doted on by Jesus. They have but a little strength yet the put-downs they endure from the seemingly 'holy' although possibly hurtful are only vain words. Holding on to the real Word of God they receive Christ's encouraging commendation – they are loved. If religious condescension on the part of other perhaps well meaning Christians has hurt your heart, hold on to God's wonderful word. Hold on and know He's holding on to you. He loves you and will never let you go.

Laodicea is loved as well and is thus disciplined. They think they've got it all, health, wealth and hallelujahs so to speak. Maybe they've gotten side tracked on social issues, church programs, spiritual narcissism or living the good life. Though they don't seem to care about Jesus, He cares so deeply for them, it wrenches His gut if you would.

Is He knocking on your door? If you're His child by faith in Jesus Christ, know that He deals correctively with all of us at various times and in various ways. In times of trial, it may seem like the Lord is far away and apathetic. That is simply untrue! The very fact that He loves you so much is why He's sick over your lack of zeal. Don't ever doubt God's immeasurable love for you. Seek Him anew for faith that endures the trials, clean garments of divine righteousness and a new clear vision of your Savior. Remember, He says, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*"