

Chapter Twelve

Healing Hurting Hearts

Several issues demand the loving attention of Christian counselors more than others. Among these are *forgiveness*, *deliverance* from sin's power, the *lordship* and *love* of Christ. And though we've treated the matter of deliverance earlier in chapter 8, perhaps it would not be amiss to see the issues of forgiveness and deliverance side by side in a brief discussion of the redemptive truth applying to each. Then we can profitably consider the value of the lordship and love of our Lord Jesus in added perspective. These are major issues in our move toward healing hurting hearts.

Our Need of Forgiveness

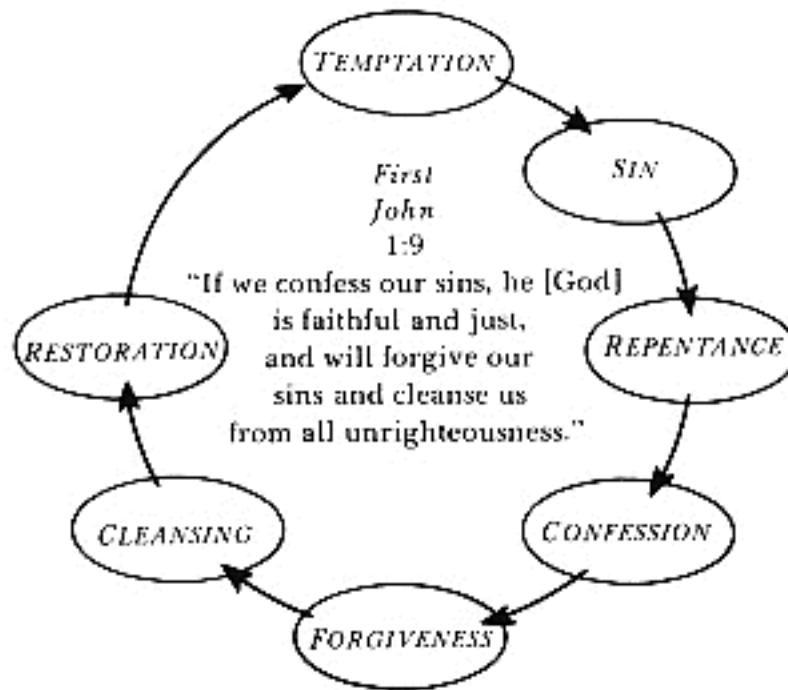
The first of these levels of freedom concerns our need for forgiveness. The problem of guilt is far deeper and more pervasive than we generally understand. Occasionally, this need for forgiveness shows up in newspaper accounts of criminals who turn themselves in even after they have escaped detection. The only explanation for such action is their need to purge their conscience of an unbearable sense of guilt. All of us, criminals or not, have felt the inner pangs of guilt produced by wrong actions and attitudes. If you doubt the reality of this, try reading through our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 through 7). These words of our Lord were designed to accentuate our sense of guilt.

All of us have a deep need for forgiveness and the freedom from guilt it provides. The Scripture is clear that we do not have to be guilt-ridden people, so for our own sake and for those we have opportunity to counsel, we must constantly appropriate the means God has made available to us for forgiveness. Applying the truth of 1 John 1, is a direct answer to this universal need. John tells us that we're kidding ourselves and calling God a liar if we say we have no sin or have not sinned (1 John 1:8, 10). But if we simply admit our sin to God, he promises to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness: "If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The ground of this forgiveness is the cross of Christ, for "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Diagram C helps us to visualize God's *Forgiveness Cycle* --a procedure we need to employ consistently to put down any possibility of carrying around a load of guilt. Note that our problem starts with *temptation* (at the top of the circle), a solicitation to sin. Temptation is *not sin*, for you will recall of our Lord Jesus that he "in every respect has been *tempted* as we are, yet - without sinning" (Heb. 4:15b, italics mine). But succumbing to temptation becomes *sin*, which must then somehow be put away, since it hinders our fellowship with God.

DIAGRAM C

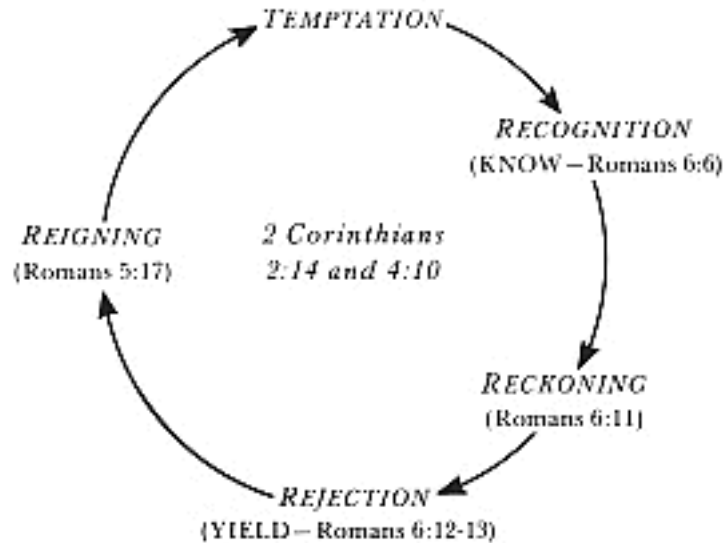
FORGIVENESS
CYCLE



The next step is *repentance*, which is "a change of mind." Repentance is a good word, though we often try to avoid it. It is not just being sorry we were caught, but rather it involves a thoroughgoing change of mental attitude about the act of sin which has been committed. The word *repentance* is not in this text, but it is implicit as the prelude to *confession*, for to confess means "to say the same thing" about my sin as God says about it. Since my mind somehow justified the act, leading to its commission, I must have a change of mind in order to acknowledge that God was right all along. So I confess *my* sin: not just by saying to God, "I confess my sin," but by telling him specifically what I did wrong and agreeing with him that it *was* wrong. On that basis he supplies complete and total *forgiveness* and *cleansing*. Forgiveness is for my sake-- to free me from guilt, while cleansing is to fit me once again for fellowship with a holy God. And note--it's cleansing *from all unrighteousness*. There is no exclusion: No sin can possibly be bad enough to permanently disrupt my fellowship with God. The only condition God stipulates is my freely acknowledging my sin in confession. Restoration into the full enjoyment of my life and fellowship with the Lord is the result. From there we go back to the top of the cycle and face the next temptation. How we all need this blessed provision!

DIAGRAM D

DELIVERANCE
CYCLE



Note that the *Deliverance Cycle* in Diagram D starts with the same problem, *temptation*, but instead of moving to *sin*, the next step in the cycle is *recognition*. Recognition is twofold: there is recognition of (1) the solicitation to sin and (2) freedom in Christ *not* to sin. For we know that "our old man was put to death with Christ in order that... we may no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). Knowing this fact, we can then move to *reckoning* it as true by faith. That is, we simply believe what God has said about our liberation from sin's enslaving power. On this basis we can move to the *rejection* of the call to sin by yielding ourselves to God rather than to sin's power (Rom. 6:12-13). The result: We can go on *reigning* in life through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17b), which is to "live like a king" instead of like a slave. What a great truth to share with those who wear the heavy shackles of sin's slavery! It is the Lordship and love of Jesus Christ that makes all this possible. He has conquered through love and is now reigning in love.

Lordship and Love

Sometimes we Christians tend to think we have a tough time of it, and in some ways we do. We face a hostile world. The world isn't friendly to us; the Lord told us it wouldn't be. And we face an implacable enemy who is very powerful and intensely active these days. That old accuser, Satan, seems to take fiendish delight in making Christians miserable. So we really do face staggering opposition. Considering the situation, we could take a "poor me" attitude, but we need not and *should* not because in our Lord Jesus we have one who is greater than the world and Satan.

It helps me keep things in perspective to look back at the first century of Christian life. The background of Paul's word to the Corinthians helps us to understand that we really don't have it so bad. Hear what Paul writes: "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

scene the magistrate might have said to you, "Well, Octavius (or whatever your name is), this is really a simple matter. All you have to do is say before this court, 'Jesus be damned; Caesar is lord!' and we will let you go." But there were many Christians who died in the arena, or on a cross, or as a flaming torch, because they insisted "*Jesu s* is Lord!," refusing to say "Caesar is lord." That is why this statement of the apostle's is so significant. As you can see, there was a great deal at stake. It was no light matter to say "Jesus is Lord!" in those days. The reason Paul adds, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit," is that it took the strengthening, enabling ministry of the strong Spirit of God to give God's people the courage to stand on the truth that Jesus is Lord.

Recently I read a very interesting book by Col. Robinson Risner. If I remember correctly, he was the first Vietnam POW to step out of the plane at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines to address us on national television. His book is entitled, *The Passing of the Night*. That's a very apt title, for it was quite a night, believe me, that he endured. The book is a description of the awful, gruesome experience he had for seven and one-half years as a prisoner of war in a North Vietnamese prison. It is not exactly pleasant reading; in fact, it is a very sobering book. But I wanted to read it because I have a friend who had stayed at the "Hanoi Hilton," as they called it, for five and a half years, and I wanted to understand something of how he would feel and think as a result of his experience.

All through the book I could only marvel at the integrity and stability of Robbie Risner as he faced unbelievable stress and torture. Then I found the explanation: You guessed it-- he's a Christian. He kept insisting that Jesus is Lord in the midst of that very hostile and terrifying situation. I got some of the inside information on Robbie's story through contacts of my POW friend. I learned that my friend said to his liaison officer (who happened, by God's appointment, to be a Christian man), "This man Robbie has something I don't understand, something I don't know anything about. Will you tell me about? You can imagine what a great time that Christian officer had in explaining to him that Robbie's integrity was an expression of the authority of faith in Jesus Christ, because Robbie had really committed himself to the lordship of Christ in his life. When everything looked bleak he was still able to say in his heart, and by his life-- "Jesus is Lord!" This is an instance of the application of that truth in one man's life just as the passage from Corinthians highlights the same truth in the lives of those early Christians.

What is the secret of spiritual strength and stability? The explanation is in two words: LORDSHIP and LOVE. I have found that it's remarkable what happens when we learn to say "Jesus is Lord!" in any situation--and it is the same whether in the first or the twentieth century. It makes no difference whether it is in a prison or a pew, and it applies equally well to individuals as it does to groups of individuals like a local church. Where Jesus is Lord, there is liberty prosperity, strength, stability--all the good things you and I really long for and love to enjoy.

In Acts 10:36 the Apostle Peter, speaking in the home of a Roman soldier, made an interesting statement on this subject He was telling Cornelius and his friend the gospel. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, he said, "You know the word which he [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus...and he adds, as a parenthetical thought, "He is Lord of all..." Here he gives us the key to Christian life: "*He is Lord of all.*" Some parenthesis, I'd say! Let's look at two details in this statement: First, what is meant by lordship, and second, what is included in that "all" in "he is Lord of *all*." In the monumental *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Kittel and Friedrich, there is an extensive treatment of this word "Lord." The following definition is gleaned from the study of lordship included there:

Lordship Means Authority

Essentially, this word "Lord" applies to *one who has ultimate, decisive authority*. It also speaks of *one who is strong, competent, important, and powerful, thus able to rule*. Lordship also denotes possession, that is, *having the legal right of ownership and the final word on the disposition of that which he owns*. It also has the sense of priority. "Lord" is equivalent to the "Chief," or the "Boss," the one who is in charge.

Now if you take all these aspects of the meaning of the word "Lord" and apply them to the Lord Jesus, in summary you find we can say of him that he is the source of power and authority. His own words say it--those amazing words given to encourage his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given

to me" (Matt. 28:18). That sounds like quite enough power, doesn't it? He has all there is. He's the strong one, fully competent. Then he adds these wonderful words (which I paraphrase), "*And I'm with you*

(Matt 28:20b). The fact that he has all power might just scare us, but when he says, "I'm with you," he makes a commitment to use that power on our behalf. It's clear why he said this to his disciples as they faced the humanly impossible task of going out and reaching the world with the gospel. Eleven weaklings were all Jesus had to work with--so they needed to hear, "All power is given to me, and I'm with you." That's his Lordship being declared to men who *had* to know their resources.

Also, the Lord Jesus is the one (since he made us) who knows the score; that is, he knows what's going on, he has all the information about our specific situation and need. Paul says of him, "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). And as Lord, he is also *the final evaluator* of all of us. I think sometimes we Christians think that because salvation is by grace, the Lord is never going to evaluate our works. But the Bible does not tell us that. It says that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10) to see how we've done. This is to be an evaluation, not a judgment to condemnation. The Lord, as Lord, has the right to evaluate what has been going on in us. There is something at stake in the Christian life. He has something for us to do, and we are held accountable to do what he says. So his Lordship gives him this right of final evaluation.

Then He is the one who owns everything--that is also implicit in this word "Lord." And because he owns everything, he has the right to rule, having full authority over that which is his. The words "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19b) express that truth. He says, "I own you on two counts: I made you, and I redeemed you. By creation and redemption, he owns us; we are his.

Lord of Creation and Re-Creation

Now let's turn and look at the "all" in Peter's words. "He is Lord of all." First, he is the Lord over *all creation*. Paul tells us in Colossians,

"for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).

Did you note the repetition of "all things" coupled with every kind of preposition language affords? All things were created *by* him...*in* him... *thro*ugh him... and *for* him. He is *before* all things...and all things hold together *in* him. *He is Lord* over all creation.

Paul goes on to say he is Lord over the new creation--that's us, the church, his people: "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent (Col. 1:18). So his lordship is unmistakably over *all*. Yet the only ones who really respond to his lordship are those who are his. We are the ones who have acknowledged his lordship--if not always in particular, at least as a general principle. Toward us he has two very wonderful characteristics. He is called "the Lord of the harvest," and "the Lord of the sabbath." These are significant terms. "The Lord of the harvest" means that he is the one who puts his people to work where he wants them, doing what he wants them to do, and that he exercises his right to send forth his workers as he wills. "The Lord of the sabbath" means that he is able to give rest in the midst of an intensely active life. It's the rest of faith. This subject is treated in detail in the next chapter.

I like the fact that the Lord Jesus insists on being who he is. There's no way he can be anything else but *Lord*. I might be confused as to who he is, but he isn't; he always knows he is Lord. Looking back at my own Christian life, I recall quite clearly that I didn't really understand the lordship of Christ when I first came to him. I knew he was some kind of authoritative person, otherwise I wouldn't have committed my life to him. But I didn't understand that the name of the name was lordship. However, he was never confused. Soon after I came to Christ I found him insisting that I do things his way. "Sorry, Bob, you're a nice fellow and all that, but

I'm not going to bend my standards for you; you've got to bend to me." And I have learned to say, "Yes, Lord, I get the picture." I began to learn that the process of growth in the Christian life is an increasing understanding and willing acceptance of who he is: *Jesus is Lord*.

Jesus is Lord not only in the sense that he is immanent in the universe, but he also wants to be Lord, personally, in each of us. The lordship of Christ is the greatest truth I know because it opens the door to my becoming the man I really want to be! He is committed to the fulfillment of my Christian manhood, and he's not going to quit until he's got the job done, for which I'm tremendously thankful. More than that, he is the one who lives in me, having *all* the answers to *all* the problems in life. He will undertake the responsibility for my total well-being, but on one basis only: if I am willing to *give* him that responsibility. Very simply, I just need to say, consistently and repeatedly, as those others I have mentioned have said, "Jesus is Lord." In every problem I face I can say, "Lord, you really are Lord to me right now, for this situation." This is the word we need to share with those we are called to counsel.

In his *Theological Dictionary*, Gerhard Kittel makes what I think is an outstanding statement on this subject:

[In the Lordship of Christ] firmly grasped, both in the emotions and will, the man [responding to his Lordship] receives unconditionally binding direction which gives meaning measure and purpose to his life; and which demands an obedience that is not exhausted in the cultivation of feeling, but manifests itself in concrete action.

In other words, the lordship of Christ in me means action exciting action. Then he adds,

Only when man is confronted with the God who made him the One who is the absolute authority, before which it is freedom rather than bondage, to bow, [is there any true liberation).

That's a great statement. Bondage is freedom--if it is bondage to Jesus Christ. Paul loved to call himself the "bondslave" of Jesus Christ. This is willing slavery which means liberty. Paradoxical? Yes, but wonderfully true. And the reason this arrangement is so desirable is that in Christ we are confronted with one who woos our hearts with the authority of ministering and forgiving love. He doesn't come at us arbitrarily; he constantly appeals to us to move with him. Only in Christ do we see lordship manifested in all its attractive power and desirability.

Our Response

Now, there is a problem, of course: it's our *performance*. Response to Christ's lordship is not perfect in any one of us. A dear friend of mine has been kind enough to take on the task of teaching me how to swing a golf club--no small job, believe me. I don't know if you've ever tried to learn to play; golf, especially in your old age, but those who have know that : the golf swing is very unnatural. Nevertheless, it's dead right. The body mechanics are undeniably true--*doing* it is another story. My friend was showing me the "weak position" of the right arm. Golf is essentially a left-handed game; the right arm is supposed to follow the action of the left side--not dominate it. At this point, he observed that the right arm is like the flesh, always trying to overpower the action. But when that happens, you have just lost your golf swing. If you keep the right arm out of the way (in the weak position), you may have a golf swing. But doing it is difficult, for in most of us the right arm is dominant. Similarly, the problem in experiencing the lordship of Christ is actually *doing* it. The old right arm of the flesh gets in there. "I can do it, Lord. I don't need you for this. I can do *some* things myself, can't I?" But the Lord says no; "Without me you can do nothing.

Jesus is LORD of ALL.

Even so, he doesn't lord it over us. He always couples LORDSHIP with LOVE. He *could* just tell us what to do and make us do it, but he doesn't. He always exercises his right to rule in *love*, in gracious consideration of that love relationship he has with us. And on that basis, he always seeks our consent and asks us to cooperate with his program; he doesn't coerce us into reluctant obedience.

When I was in college, I had two dogs. One was a beautiful gold-colored collie with a white ruff named Jimmie, and the other was a magnificent silver-and-black longhaired German shepherd named Pat. They were quite an impressive pair, and everywhere they went with me they attracted attention. They were also a very interesting behavioral study. Jimmie, with all his beauty, was a pain because he had an obedience problem. He never wanted to do what I told him. If I finally insisted, and worked at it to make him behave, he'd do it, but it was always a struggle. Some of us are like that with the Lord, aren't we? But Pat was quite different. He was eager to please. Whenever I showed up, he was right there ready to go, looking at me with an expectant look, eager to do whatever I had in mind, and enjoying every moment of it. Jimmie wasn't enjoying it very much because he only obeyed under pressure; Pat was loving every moment of it.

For me those dogs were a graphic picture of two kinds of Christians, showing two kinds of response to the lordship of Christ. I want to be a "Pat," not a "Jimmie," in case you're in doubt. Can you imagine the Lord's delight in us if we approached all of life this way? "Here I am, Lord, ready to go. Whatever you have in mind for today, let's do it together." We could move in every situation, whether it's playing golf or facing into a problem with confident, eager expectation.

Lordship and love, love and lordship--a great combination. If there is anything designed to give us the liberty and fullness of life, I submit that these two are the combination of features that make for a *great life*.

In our counseling ministry we need to ask our counselees: Where are you in this program? That's what the Lord is always concerned about. Are you enjoying all he's made you to be? Have you discovered that he's given you a personality and a ministry, in addition to gifts, talents, and opportunities? He wants you to use all of them and *live* a little. Unfortunately there are many Christians who have heard a lot of truth but who are not really living joyfully. I think the reason is simple: They haven't learned yet how to take that "weak position." The right arm, the flesh, is trying to overpower the spiritual life. The flesh is too often in the ascendancy. Consequently, we're missing out on much of what the Lord has in mind for us.

For VIP's

I like to ask people the question, "Are you a VIP?" (that means, "Very Important Person"). You may ask, "A VIP in whose eyes? I'm important to somebody. My wife (or my husband) loves me. The kids don't think I'm too bad. I'm important to them. At least, I bring home the paycheck regularly." But I really mean: Do you think you are important in the eyes of the one who counts most--important in God's eyes? I submit to you that you *are*. *You're very important to him*. He's proved it to you. How? He's offered to be your Lord! He's made himself wholly available to you. Now reverse the arrows. *He is* also a very important person to you because he is Lord. No matter what anybody else will ever have to say about it, the Apostle Paul said the final word on this subject:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11, italics mine).

The reason this double-edged truth is so very important is that many people sell themselves short, and thereby sell the Lord short. So many say or think, "Poor little me. I don't have anything; I can't do anything; I'm not important." Not only is that not true, but such an attitude speaks very poorly for the Lord who loves you so much. You are you, and you need to understand and enjoy that sense of importance, that dignity of human personality which is the privilege of everyone of us who is indwelt by the Lord Jesus. What a joy--to tell those we are trying to help: Jesus is Lord! And he loves you!

[Go to Chapter Thirteen](#)
[Back to Table of Contents](#)