

*Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

---

We all know that the television is filled with disturbing stories and images. But one would not normally expect to be disturbed by a commercial. But one commercial that is running currently certainly makes a person uncomfortable as you watch it. The commercial begins with a group of executives sitting down for a noon-time meal. One of the men eating takes a bite and starts to choke. Another of the executives notes that he is choking, and alerts the others to the problem. "I know exactly what to do," he proclaims. But rather than doing something, he remains seated and explains calmly how one would perform the Heimlich maneuver. The others just sit there and calmly agree with his analysis. All this time, the man choking begins to turn blue. Finally, a man from another table comes, performs the Heimlich, and saves the man's life. The suspense leading up to that point nearly makes you want to jump into the screen to save the man.

As I pondered the text for the day I began to wonder if this disturbing commercial serves as a frighteningly accurate illustration of exactly how most of us Christians react to sin in our midst in our day. We say that know how to fix it, we discuss how to fix it, and all along we allow those sitting right next to us to choke on this or that sin.

Paul today in his letter to the Galatians writes the following, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." In this verse, Paul instructs us, as it were, to keep our eyes open for our brothers and sisters in Christ who might be choking on sin. And even more importantly, he instructs us to do something about it when we see it happen. He tells us that those of us who are spiritual, namely those of us who have the Holy Spirit, that we have as one of our responsibilities to restore other Christians when we see them overcome with sin.

First, we should note exactly who Paul is talking about in our text. He is talking about those Christians who normally walk in our midst, but have been dragged off by temptation to one sin or the other. That is to say, that Paul's instructions are given to the church for their dealings with one another. He speaks of restoring brothers and sisters in Christ who have fallen.

Paul tells us that we approach the whole task of restoration with two important attitudes. First, we are to approach our Christian brothers or sisters with gentleness. We are not to break down someone's door full of wrath and pride. We do not go out to someone's house in order to drag their nose in the stench of their sin. As Paul reminds us, the whole reason that we go about this task of bringing sin to light at all is for the purpose of restoring them unto Christ and the life He offers to his Church. If we go with restoration as our aim, we only follow our God's lead. God does not remind us of our own sins in order that He might see us squirm, but rather that we might turn to Him and be restored. So also, when we go to talk to our brother about his sin we go only to restore. We view him as a brother who unfortunately has been overcome by temptation. In other words, even though it might not always be taken as such, we always go our brother in love.

Secondly, Paul tells us to go about restoring a brother with humility. He says specifically that in going we are to consider or think about ourselves lest we also fall. Basically, we go as one who knows that the ability to fall into sin is very much something we are well acquainted with. This is important for two reasons.

First, it makes it much easier to go to our brother or sister in gentleness when we realize that he is not different than us in his ability to sin. This realization leads us to go to our brother or sister with compassion rather than prideful amazement at his or her sin. While we may not have fallen into the same sin we go to restore a brother from, we know our own weakness at times to temptation. We go then as a fellow brother or sister struggling to rid our lives of sin rather than as one who presumes to be sinless and comes only to gloat.

Secondly, knowing that we have the ability and even tendency to fall into temptation and sin, we are careful that in talking to our brother about his sin we do not end up involved in the same sin he is involved in. It makes sure that we do not end up joining him in his sin rather than restoring him from it.

Even if we understand all of Paul's teaching up to this point and can discuss it easily among one another, we still can remain as the man in the commercial who sits calmly discussing the solution to a dire situation without doing anything about it. No, we must not only talk about it, but put in into practice.

No doubt, the often astonishing level of sin within the walls of Christian churches today is due in large measure to the church and its members not restoring one another when we fall into sin. The church has become much more comfortable with allowing all sorts of sin within our midst rather than taking a stand against such

things. But this can not be. Apathetic acceptance of sin within the body of Christ is a recipe for disaster. For sin, when it is full-grown leads to death.

We must realize sin in our own life, and also must watch for it in each other's life. And when we see it, we must go to each other in order to restore one another from that sin. For if we allow sin to make its home in the Body of the Christ, we should not be surprised when that body does not function properly.

Generations ago, sin was dealt with very publicly and openly in the church. Excommunications were not all that uncommon. However, at least in many cases, the way that sin was dealt with in generations past was done with very little regard for the restoration of the individual. It was at times a loveless form of discipline that the church employed. In fact, I was recently told of a Pastor who would say that when the church excommunicated someone that not only were the doors to heaven locked for that person, but that the keys were also being thrown away. Surely, this type of statement missed the point that when we bring sin to light, it is not to lock people out of the Kingdom of Heaven eternally, but rather that they might be restored to that Kingdom.

Recent generations have taken the exact opposite approach to dealing with sin. Except perhaps for a few pet sins picked by the individual pastor, the church has decided not to get dirty with sin. Even gross sins are allowed to occur in the body of Christ for the sake of not offending anyone and keeping everyone possible on the roles of the church. The idea of confronting someone with their sin directly seems like an outdated practice of churches past.

So what of our generation? Will we continue to allow sin to flourish where it will, even if it is in the pews of church? Or will we return to the loveless discipline of church past? My hope is that our generation will be known for neither. Rather we will be a church that is known for restoring members who have been overtaken into sin with the gentleness and humility that Paul encourages in our text for the day.

The need to return to this way of dealing with sin is urgent. But the return to this way of living together in the Body will not be accomplished only with the efforts of individual pastors and elders. Rather, as Paul encourages, each one of us who has the Holy Spirit must take this responsibility upon themselves. We must not be afraid to confront our brothers and sisters with their sin in hope of their restoration. For a return to dealing with sin as Paul encourages will happen only as men confront rather than encourage one another in regard to the

sins of lust so prevalent among us. It will occur only as women confront rather than encourage one another in regards to spreading gossip. It will occur only as our young people confront rather than encourage their friends when it comes to their sinful choices regarding sexuality, drugs, and alcohol.

We have two choices. We can sit around and talk about the solution to sin in our midst or we can get up out of our chairs by the help of the Holy Spirit and begin to help remove sin from our choking brothers and sister's lives by leading them to Jesus and his forgiving arms.

Paul encourages us this day to get up and act. For each time we bring sin to light, be that as we examine our own lives in confession or as we confront our brother or sister about their sin, we give Jesus another opportunity to make manifest His marvelous gospel. We give him another opportunity to bring to light His death and resurrection which covers all our sins. This day we repent of the times when we have allowed sin to linger in our midst or have dealt with our brothers and sisters without the gentleness and humility required. As we repent, for Christ's sake, God forgives us anew. And as He forgives us, He renews in us his Holy Spirit, making us spiritual people ready to rightly deal with one another when we fall into sin.

For as ones who know that the answer to people choking on sin is Jesus, we can no longer sit by and watch them choke. Rather today we are called to get up, and to wrap Jesus' loving arms around them that the sin might be expelled from their life and that they might be restored to His marvelous Gospel and Kingdom. May God indeed prompt each of us to leave our chairs for the sake of Jesus. Amen.