

Restoring the Fallen

Galatians 6:1-5

Intro

The sitcom *Friends* was one of the most popular television shows of all time. The series was nominated for 62 Primetime Emmy Awards and was aired for ten years from 1994 to 2004. Every week, 50 million people watched six actors pretend to have relationships with one another. Its popularity was fueled by the deep need we all have to be connected in community.

But the real deep need is found in the biblical word, *koinonia*, which means "fellowship." God's plan from the beginning was that each one of us would belong to a spiritual community (the church), where we all would be known, where we would know each other, and help each other in difficult times.

Dr. Leonard Syme, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California at Berkeley, indicates the importance of social ties and social support systems in relationship to mortality and disease rates. He points to Japan as being number one in the world with respect to health and then discusses the close social, cultural, and traditional ties in that country as the reason.

He believes that the more social ties, the better the health and the lower the death rate. Conversely, he indicates that the more isolated the person, the poorer the health and the higher the death rate. Social ties are good preventative medicine for physical problems and for mental-emotional-behavior problems.

(Source: Martin & Diedre Bobgan, *How To Counsel From Scripture*, Moody Press).

Verse 1

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

Brothers – Paul wants to maintain his exhortation on a personal level. He is talking about believers who struggle. He puts forth a hypothetical situation yet one not at all unrealistic.

An occasion of an unexpected fall of a believer is most difficult to deal with. There is a tendency to pass severe criticism on the part of pious Christians. Someone once said that "the church is the only army in the world that shoots its wounded!"

Caught in a sin – trapped or overtaken in sin.

It is so easy to be overtaken by sin.

Paul talks about that in Romans 7:18-19. He says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."

Also in James 1:14 we read, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

It is easy to get caught in sin and that's why we need each other especially those who are spiritually strong. There is an accountability that is needed in the Christian community.

You who are spiritual – are those walking in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and manifesting the fruit of the spirit, who, by virtue of their spiritual strength, are responsible for those who are weak.

In Romans 15:1 Paul says, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

Basically what Scripture is teaching here is that the spiritually and morally strong have a responsibility for the spiritually and morally weak. The strong need to get involved.

Restore him gently – The New Testament Greek verb here for “restore” does not constitute a one-time act but a persistence in restoring continually.

Restore in Greek literally means to mend or repair. It was also used of setting a broken bone or putting a dislocated limb back in place.

That is the figure used by the writer of Hebrews in calling on believers to “strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:12-13).

How do we restore a fallen brother or sister? It’s in the spirit of gentleness. The work of restoration is a delicate work which requires an approach of tenderness. Gentleness is one of the fruits of the Spirit in which the Spirit desires to produce in us.

Reproof or condemnation does not help a fallen believer who already feels the weight of their sin and fault. We are to restore not pass judgment. This is where true fellowship takes place when we help a fallen brother or sister.

Fellowship is a place of grace -- a place where mistakes aren’t *rubbed in*, they’re *rubbed out*.

We all need mercy, because we all stumble and fall and require help getting back on track. We need to offer mercy and be willing to receive mercy from each other.

“When people sin, you should forgive and comfort them, so they won't give up in despair”
(2 Corinthians 2:7, CEV).

But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted – There is a caution here. The word “watch” means consider the object before you fire the shot. It is clear that even spiritual strong believers can stumble. They are made of the same stuff as those who have fallen. They too could be tempted and even fall into the same sin for which they restored a brother or sister.

No matter how spiritual you are, you have no immunity from temptation and that you are capable of falling too.

Verse 2

“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Carry each other’s burdens – If a Christian brother or sister is weighed down or menaced by some burden or threat, we need to be alert to that and quickly do something to help. Don't let them be crushed. Don't let them be destroyed. Don't be like the scribes and Pharisees who took pride in their self righteousness and looked down on helpless sinners.

Jesus said about them that, "They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (Matthew 23:4).

A **burden** is anything that threatens to crush the joy of our faith—whether a tragedy that threatens to make us doubt God's goodness, or a sin that threatens to drag us into guilt and judgment.

One of the most profound ways of having deep Christian communion with a fellow brother or sister is carrying each other’s burden.

Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface-level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart-to-heart, sometimes gut-level sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives - when they share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses, and ask for help and prayer.

You have to be authentic and it requires both courage and humility. It means facing our fear of exposure, of rejection, and of being hurt again. Why would anyone take such a risk? Because it's the only way to grow spiritually and maintain emotional health.

The Bible says, *"Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed"* (James 5:16, *Msg*). We only grow by taking risks, and the most difficult risk of all is to be honest with ourselves and with others.

All of us are more consistent in our faith when others walk with us and encourage us. The Bible commands mutual accountability, mutual encouragement, and mutual serving. We need to be open to each other and have no secret friendships.

Illustration

Christian author John Ortberg writes of the power of no-secret friendships:

"One of the most important moments of my spiritual life was when I sat down with a longtime friend and said, 'I don't want to have any secrets anymore.'

I told him everything I was most ashamed of. I told him about my jealousies, my cowardice, how I hurt my wife with my anger. I told him about my history with money and my history with sex. I told him about deceit and regrets that keep me up at night. I felt vulnerable because I was afraid that I was going to lose connection with him. Much to my surprise, he did not even look away.

I will never forget his next words.

'John,' he said. 'I have never loved you more than I love you right now.' The very truth about me that I thought would drive him away became a bond that drew us closer together. He then went on to speak with me about secrets he had been carrying.

If I keep part of my life secret from you, you may tell me you love me. But inside I think that you would not love me if you knew the whole truth about me. I can only receive love from you to the extent that I am known by you."

(Source: John Ortberg's *The Me I Want to Be*, Zondervan, 2009.)

We also need to sympathize with each other. Sympathy is entering in and sharing the pain of others. Sympathy says, "I understand what you're going through, and what you feel is neither strange nor crazy."

Illustration

I came across this powerful story and illustration of how we can learn from children. A little girl lost a playmate to terminal illness and one day she told her family that she had gone to comfort the sorrowing mother. "What did you say?" asked the father. "Nothing," she replied, "I just climbed up on her lap and cried with her." Wow!

The Fellowship of Suffering

The fellowship of suffering is the deepest, most intense level of fellowship. It's where we enter into each other's pain and grief and carry each other's burdens.

We need each other most during times of deep crisis, grief, and doubt. When circumstances crush us to the point that our faith falters, that's when we need believing friends the most. We need a small group of friends to have faith in God for us and to pull us through.

The caring of souls is risky business sometimes. There are no guarantees that people will choose the way you have earnestly prayed for them, or take the counsel you have given them. The truth is you may face pain and sorrow for taking the time to care for souls. You may find that it could be the most disappointing part of ministry. But I do know God is not wasteful, and he uses whatever efforts we give to others to work about his plan for his people that he dearly loves.

And in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ – What Paul says here is that we are under the submission not of a code of laws and rules but a **Person** - Christ.

We have an obligation to fulfill what Christ has commanded. He commanded us to love one another. Jesus said in John 15:13-14, *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. No one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for his friends.”* The law of Christ is the law of love, sacrificial giving of self love.

As Christ carried our burdens we ought to do the same in His power and love.

Verse 3

“If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Two errors might keep a Christian from fulfilling the law of Christ.

First, is conceit – thinking he/she is more important than they are.

And the second one is in verse 4 – the error of always comparing oneself with others.

One of the main reasons many Christians do not bother to help fellow Christians is that they feel superior to the fallen brother or sister and wrongly consider themselves to be spiritually invincible when the truth is that they are not.

The Christian who thinks he/she is something when he is nothing needs first to “take the log out of his own eye” (Matt. 7:5). If they refuse to see their own spiritual need, then they deceive themselves.

Because we are all in spiritual need!

Verse 4

“Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else...”

A believer’s first responsibility is to “test” or examine, to be sure one’s attitudes and life are right in the eyes of the Lord before one attempts to give spiritual help to others. Then, and only then, will one have reason to feel strong in a proper way. If anything remains for boasting after honest self-examination, it will be that which induces boasting in the Lord.

“But, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” For it is not the man who commends himself who is approved, but the man whom the Lord commends” (2 Cor. 10:12-18). In other words “if you want to claim credit, claim it for God. What you say about yourself means nothing in God’s work. It’s what God says about you that makes the difference” (Message Bible).

Verse 5

“...for each one should carry his own load.”

Paul’s command for each one to bear his own load seems to contradict what he has just said about bearing one another’s burdens (verse 2). But he uses a different term here “load” (*phortion* in Greek) refers to anything that is carried, and has no connotation of difficulty. It is also the word used for a soldier’s back pack. It was often used of the general obligations of life that a person is responsible to bear on his/her own.

“Load” refers to fulfilling one’s personal calling and ministry for the Lord. Jesus assures His followers that the “load” of service He gives them “is light” (Matt. 11:30). In either case, we as believers are accountable to bear our load, even the light one Christ gives us and to answer for our faithfulness in so doing when we face Him (2 Cor. 5:10).

Conclusion

E. Glenn Wagner (pastor and author of many books) writes:

“Several years ago,” he said, “I began having some disturbing conversations with pastors, Christian psychologists, and counselors. All of them were frustrated and saying, ‘What are we doing? Why are we doing it? Why does it seem that the more energy and money we put into the church, the less impact and effectiveness we have? Our churches don’t seem to have the strength and the passion that God speaks of in the Scriptures.’ One theme in our discussions continually resurfaced: our failure to build the church around the relationally driven model prescribed in the Bible. Instead, we have opted for a corporate model driven by programs and tasks. It is no wonder that the church is having such a negligible influence on culture, because personal transformation takes place largely through relationships.”

We, the church, need to change. The relational ministry has to have precedence over our programs and church administration. We live in a broken world that needs love and care.

Our God is an interpersonal God, and he created us as interpersonal beings. Yet sometimes we don’t act like it. We are living in an age where technology is progressing every day, which is greatly influencing how we do ministry. Machine is often portrayed as more important than humanity in this computer, cell phone driven society and such a worldview is spilling over into our churches. As Christians, we need to discern when it’s time to connect through cyberspace, computer to computer, and when it is time to connect through our own physical space, chair to chair.

Sometimes, if you do not have a relationship with the person, all you can do is pray. But when the situation involves someone you know, the Lord may want you to be involved. Remember, it’s never convenient or easy to go after a Christian who has fallen into the clutches of the enemy. It is always risky and it takes time and emotional energy. But the Lord Jesus went after the straying sheep, and if we are His followers, we must do the same. It is not just the responsibility of pastors. It is the responsibility of every mature (spiritual) Christian.

Let’s take care of each other!