Gal. 6:1; John 21:15-19; Restoring Sinners I. Who Should Restore II. How they should Restore III. The Warning to those who Restore

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how do you deal with conflict? Well, most people deal with conflict in one of two ways. The first extreme is that of avoidance. Some people are prone to run away from all conflict- which means they tend to overlook and ignore all sin. The other extreme is that of being overly confrontational. Some people just love to fight- they are always at the center of battles and they enjoy the debate. So the extremes that most of us struggle with is either that we are weak willed or strong willed. We are like a wet blanket or a firebrand. But this is not the way we should act within the church- there is a proper way to expose sin without being harsh and rude. As we return to Gal. 6, we remember that the context here is a calling to holiness! We are to crucify the old man- put to death the sins of pride, unjust anger and the desire for revenge. We are also to come alive in the image of Christ- to live and walk by the Spirit! Knowing that the fruit of the Spirit includes love, peace, and gentleness. So today we are going learn the proper way to deal with conflict. Now errors can be found in many different ways- there can be an error evident in teaching, or someone can fall into sin. A person can fall because of their immaturity or by their backsliding into sin. Jesus is going to be teaching us how to deal with someone who has been overtaken with a fault. Someone who was caught up in transgression. The image is that of someone who was walking and then tripped- so that they fell on their face. Or a bird that had been caught in a snare. How can you help them- what is the responsibility of the church towards someone who has fallen into sin. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ calls the church to restore a sinner to spiritual health.

**I. Who Should Restore**

As we begin, we see that this command to restore is given to the church. As v. 1 opens, brothers. “Brothers” is a term used to describe the male leaders of the church- as the letters were written to the saints of this or that church. But this address can easily be extended to include the congregation as a whole. This call to restore a straying sinner is found in the context of the family- brothers and sisters in Christ. As a part of God’s family, the spiritual wellbeing of our fellow pilgrims is our concern as well. Added to this, these brothers are to be spiritual. It is the spiritual ones in your midst. Now the spiritual one is someone who is filled with the Spirit. As we saw in chapter 5- one who lives and walks by the Spirit. One who has the fruit of the Spirit evident in their lives. One who is spiritual again describes someone who is a true Christian who is living a consistently Christian life. Being spiritual means that the one who is called to restore others is a mature, godly and experienced Christian. In other words, baby Christians- or those who are new to the faith- may not have the maturity and wisdom that is necessary to restore someone who is straying. Rather, the one who restores must be consistent. Now this does not mean that some people are super Christians- that there is an elite class of Christians that are super spiritual. Paul is not advocating a two-tier Christianity. Rather, as is evident in the marks of an elder, those who are called to lead must be mature and not new to the faith lest they be puffed up with concept. Rather they must be able to teach- so there is a spiritual maturity that is necessary in order for one to see sin clearly and confront sin in others. This maturity helps them deal with not only the sinful action but the root issue as well. For example, a Spiritually mature Christian has come to see that sin starts in the heart. So if a person is prone to anger and words of wrath, they not only need to confess their sinful words but the anger and resentment that lives within as well. A mature Christian has a lived experience that guide their own confronting of sin. They know their own heart- and the deceitfulness of sin- and this helps to equip them in this work of restoration. So when Paul states in v. 1 that those who are spiritual should restore, he is assuming that there are spiritual people in the church who can restore! Not just a few- but many saints who are willing to help those who are struggling with sin. Paul is dealing with inner church matters. The Spirit gives us wisdom to act here! We are not called to judge the world- but we are called to judge those within the church as I Cor. 5 teaches. There is mutual accountability- we love the fellowship so much that we want to help those who are struggling with sin. The process outlined in Mt. 18 starts with the individual and then extends up with to the elders. But the principle is clear, if you brother sins against you, you are to go to him and confront his sin in the hope of seeing him repent. There is a shared, mutual accountability within the church. When someone falls, we are willing to help them back up again! This is because we love them- and we want to see them walking in step with the Spirit again!

**II. How they should Restore**

Now that we have seen who is to do this work- those who are godly or spiritual; next we see how it is that they are to do this work. Not only the work itself- but how it is accomplished. Or to state this point in another way- how you do something makes huge difference! The attitude is almost as important as the work done itself! So those who restore must do so with gentleness- in the spirit of meekness. When correcting others- you must not have a spirit of pride or act as if you are lording over others. A harsh hand and a critical spirit stirs up wrath. Gentleness is not only part of the fruit of the Spirit- it is mark of a good shepherd. As Jesus Himself is gentle and lowly- meek and mild- so those who seek to tend to the wounds of others must display this character. No one wants a doctor that is harsh or rude! A doctor who is not considerate of his patient is said to have no bedside manners. They give off an air of pride- they have all the answers- and you are just a number- a problem to be dealt with. So it is within the church, those who help others must not have a holier than thou attitude. Rather, they must be supportive as they seek to help. A spirit of humility. This work is to be work of restoring lost sheep. Not driving the sheep away into the night. The word for restoration here is connected to the setting of broken bone back in place. You can picture that someone who falls into sin is like falling and getting a broken bone. The bone is out of place- sticking out at the wrong angle. To restore is to make this broken bone right again! To make sound that which was sick. To bring back the straying. To teach the ignorant- to bind wounds. Those out of step brought back in step. Literally restoration to make complete and whole again. The one who restores wants to bring this person who has sinned back to their former place of fellowship. Love rejoices in the truth- it is does not rejoice in evil. Children, imagine that you had a broken bone in your leg. How would you feal if your friends just pointed and laughed at you instead of helping? Well, that is what gossip really is! Instead of helping someone who has fallen into sin, those who gossip are pointing and laughing instead of trying to help! So when someone falls into sin and needs to be restored, those who find out about it must seek to gently restore the one who has fallen. As I said before, this falling into sin or being caught in a transgression is not describing a public, flagrant sin. This is private and isolated- someone who got tripped up by temptation. To be clear, there are times when public sins must be dealt with a rebuke pointedly. Paul says as much in I Tim. 5:20- to rebuke these false teachers sharply in the presence of all. Public, deliberate and habitual sins need a more pointed and direct response. But that is not what we are dealing with today. As an example of this restoration, consider our reading from John 21. After Peter had denied Jesus 3 times, Jesus asks Peter 3 times- do you love me? After Peter reaffirms his love, Jesus reinstates him with the command to feed His sheep. Peter was lovingly, graciously, gently restored by Jesus even though he had succumbed to temptation. So Jesus again proves that He delights in the restoration of one sinner- someone who is led to see their sins is graciously brought back. If your brother listens to your rebuke, you have gained your brother. This kind of love covers a multitude of sins.

**III. The Warning to those who Restore**

Now that we have considered the process by which a fallen sinner can be restored to health within the church, v. 1 concludes with a warning for those who are called to restore. Not only is the sinner warned about their sin- but the one who is restoring the sinner is warned as well! The attitude of the one who restores must be- “but for the grace of God, I too would fall.” So Paul says, keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Now what temptation would this spiritual person face? Well, the temptation that they might face could come from two sources. The first source of temptation comes from the sin you are confronting. When dealing with the sins of others, you may be tempted to fall into that very sin! I have seen this happen before. For example, let’s say that you are helping someone who struggles with pornography. This person shares their secret stash of pornography with you, and you start to look at it and take pleasure in it yourself. You have just fallen into the very sin that you were trying to help them with. Or an elder who visits a wife who has been forsaken by her husband- if he is not careful he may be tempted to commit adultery when trying to help someone who was cheated on! Being in a position of authority often sets the stage for greater temptation. As you seek to help others with their own sin- that sin becomes a source of temptation to you! Trying to help an addict- and you find yourself lured to that addiction as well. This is the first source of temptation- the second source of temptation is found in your own heart. The sin that we are warned against here is that of pride! When helping others, you tend to become elevated in your own estimation! Paul points to this in v. 3- if you think you are something, when you are nothing, you deceive yourself. Those who are called to restore others must be on guard against spiritual pride! You start to think that others need you- that you are so gifted and eloquent! It is like a preacher who gets praised for their work in the ministry- who then starts to become elevated in his own eyes. You know, I really am a pretty good preacher and counselor and teacher. I’ve got the whole thing under control- I’ve got this! Spiritual pride is a constant source of temptation within the church- especially for those called to lead. If anyone thinks he stands, beware lest he fall. So as Jesus would teach in Matthew 7, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you can help your brother with the speck in his eye. Be careful in this work- make sure that you are not committing this same sin or the sin of pride as you do this good work of restoration! It must also be said- those who are restored must accept this correction with a submission. Those who are in the wrong must humbly be willing to learn. No one has all the answers- no one is perfectly consistent in all areas of life. That is why God places us within the context of the local church where we find mutual accountability! This is how disciples are made and this is where discipline takes place! Elders not only are to keep watch over the flock- but the keep watch over their own lives as well! The Father disciplines the ones He loves- so those who are a part of God’s family must hold each other accountable as we seek to grow in holiness and by the Spirit.

To conclude, breaking down is easy! As those in construction can testify, it is really easy to demolish and break down. Anyone with a hammer can break things. The tearing down of buildings and of people is easy to do. But the restoration- the rebuilding- that takes great time and care! The power of life and death are in the tongue as Prov. 18 says. Jesus Christ calls the church to restore a sinner to spiritual health. Jesus Christ is our compassionate and merciful High Priest- He knows our weakness and He carries our flesh. So also, those who are called to restore others must be compassionate and merciful!