

## **RESTORING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE**

The Church is composed of many members, each contributing to the overall health of the Body. We are interdependent and where one suffers, we all suffer and where one is honored, everyone rejoices (1 Corinthians 12:26). In a healthy Church the restoring of a sinning member in love is a quiet process. It calls for each of us to care enough to speak to someone we know who is sinning. Frequently, this loving maintenance of the body is all that is required. Where resistance occurs and sin deepens and persists, the restorative process will require others to become involved to assure that health is restored to the member and to the Body. Love must always be our motivation and restoration our goal in all aspects of Church discipline.

It is important that we begin by being open ourselves with fellow members in personal confession of sin, when that occurs, seeking their counsel and support. The study of pertinent passages on restoration and a willingness to practice it on a personal level will help a Church address the majority of concerns that need correcting. In any matter calling for restoration we must never merely admonish someone but always assure individuals of our love and our willingness to help in the repentance process.

When a member sins he breaks the Law of God and needs to be reconciled with God as soon as possible. When a member's sin involves another person, it is his spiritual responsibility to go and be reconciled to the person he has sinned against as soon as possible (Matthew 5:23-24). If he confesses his sin, submitting to God and the person he has sinned against and sincerely seeks reconciliation his sin is forgiven (1 John 1:9).

When sin knowingly is not confronted by the member or the church, the teaching of scripture is violated even further, and instead of sin being properly confronted and contained it multiplies (1 Corinthians 5:6-7; Galatians 5:9). Restoring an erring member is one of the marks of the true Church and must not be neglected by the leadership or the congregation.

When sin is apparent - there are two possibilities that exist when a person is faced with his sin. He either eventually listens to the admonishment and confesses his sin or refuses to listen, does not confess, is not reconciled and is not restored to fellowship with Christ or His Church. It is the latter possibility that may become more complex and involves the formal discipline of the member by the church. The scripture provides specific instruction for both possibilities.

### **Step I - PRIVATE LEVEL - ALWAYS START HERE**

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (Matthew 18:15). When this is done and the member truly "listens" the restorative process has begun. Confidentiality is crucial for restoration to occur at this time. Galatians 6:1-5 elaborates that the "GOING" and "SHOWING" must be aimed at restoring the member in gentleness, humility, and love with a willingness to help "carry each other's burdens". James 5:9 (Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!) gives us powerful motivation to go in such a case.

". . . Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." James 5:20

The concept of prevention is very clear in this passage. Confession is made to only those sinned against and those the sinner finds liberty in confessing to. Unfortunately, as

fellow believers we often do not "GO" and "SHOW" our brother his fault. The fault can then lead to a "multitude of sin".

## Step 2 - SEMI-PRIVATE LEVEL - TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS

If the member refuses to listen and achieve reconciliation "take one or two others along" (Matthew 18:16) so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (based on Deuteronomy 19:15-21) One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 16 If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime,

17 the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. 18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, 19 then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. 20 The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. 21 Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. ).

This step is semi-private and only is to occur if Step I was unsuccessful. Confidentiality again is crucial here, keeping it confined only to those directly involved.

It is the original person sinned against or who has knowledge of the sin who has the responsibility to take no more than two other members with him to meet again. The intent now is to achieve factual clarity about the sin and also still to counsel and help the person confess his sin and "win your brother over". The "witnesses" according to Galatians 6:1 ought to be "spiritual" and so the person may well ask Bible Study Leaders or Elders to be involved in helping to restore the member. Since there is no time frame given in this step nor in the first, this could involve several attempts at restoration. Confession again is made to those in the meeting and to any person sinned against. It is assumed that if there is openness to listen this step should be continued to complete restoration.

## Step 3 - ELDERS/CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL - FORMAL DISCIPLINE IS INITIATED

A. Refusal to listen to two or three results in the witnesses telling the facts of the sin and their meeting(s) to the Elder's Restorative Committee (3 members). These Elders will conscientiously review whether the restorative process has been sound up to this point (Steps 1 and 2 above). Further consultation may be required to exhaust all possibilities of restoring the erring member.

B. When all efforts have failed up to this point the Elder's Restorative Committee will bring the matter to a Restorative Meeting to be attended by the Membership Council and members of the congregation who wish to attend. A note in the Sunday Bulletin will announce the time and place of the Restorative Meeting. This is in keeping with the Scriptural junction, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17). Ideally the person involved would be present at the meeting.

## Step 4 - THE CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL - SEEKING TO WIN THEM BACK

The members attending the Restorative Meeting will be given opportunity to face the person with his sin and the established facts in expectation that he will yet listen to them. A reasonable amount of time (2-3 months) will be given for members to win back the erring member. Their approach needs to be always in love and with compassion seeking to restore the errant member back to fellowship. Any personal contacts by members should be shared

with the Elders Restorative Committee. The Elder's Restorative Committee in due time will make a final contact with the errant member to determine if members have made contact and any progress towards restoration that may have occurred. If the member continues to refuse to listen, then the Elder's Restorative Committee on behalf of the church with the authority and agreement of Jesus Christ Himself (cp. Matthew 18:18) must expel the member formally from the church and the fellowship it provides. A brief comment, "Member's name has been released from our membership" will appear in the bulletin. A letter to that effect will also be delivered in person where possible by a member of the Elder's Restorative Committee or the Senior Pastor. Otherwise the letter will be mailed.

The member is not primarily expelled from the church because of his sin but because he has rejected and not submitted to the authority of the Church of Christ refusing to repent and be reconciled ( Hebrews 13:7). Formal discipline is intended to preserve the honor of God's name, to assure the purity of the Church (1 Corinthians 5:7) and to eventually reconcile and restore the offending member.

#### Step 5 - CONGREGATION LEVEL - RELATIONSHIP WITH DISFELLOWSHIPED MEMBER

Once the member has been disfellowshipped the statement in 1 Corinthians 5:11 would apply to his relationship with other church members. (i.e.) - ". . . you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

This treatment is crucial for any brother to experience the discipline of the Lord which is designed to eventually restore him. It is a very powerful thing to be disfellowshipped by your spiritual family in this way and it should not be continued indefinitely. Nevertheless, the scripture teaches us that it is God's way to achieve full restoration. To do anything less would be to rob the greatest opportunity to win the member back. Application in this matter involves spiritual relationships, not natural or family relationships.

#### Step 6 - ELDER'S/CONGREGATION LEVEL - A FORMAL ACT TO AGAIN IS INITIATED ASSOCIATE

After the believer has been expelled for a period of time (not more than one year) wherein the church has not associated with the person, the scripture teaches that the church is to meet the person again reaffirming its love and concern (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). This passage says that if this is not done the disciplined member may be "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" and that Satan may gain unwarranted opportunity to totally overtake him (cp. 1 Corinthians 5:5). If the member is repentant the work of restoration can occur. If there is still resistance the member remains in the expelled state. Love would dictate that after awhile another formal attempt at STEP II might be taken again and probably again. The church's decision should only be reversed when the person shows genuine repentance, restitution where needed, reconciliation and a willingness to submit to the leadership's attempts to bring about the fullest possible restoration under the circumstances. At such a time the whole church should be informed, encouraged to forgive the person, and demonstrate ongoing genuine support and love.

The preceding steps would also apply to:

1. A member who is in error in teaching and belief (Galatians 1:7-9).
2. A member who is idle, who makes no payments, does no work, and becomes a financial burden (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).
3. A member who is divisive (Titus 3:10-11).

4. An elder caught in sin. The unique instruction here is that when an elder's sin is confirmed by two or three witnesses (as per Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19) he is to be "rebuked publicly so that others may take warning". A warning is also given to "keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism" (1 Timothy 5:19-20). It is important to note in this passage that "those who sin" refers both to a malicious witness (Deuteronomy 19:15-21) against an elder and to the elder who has sinned.

5. A member who is a habitual sinner and is unrepentant. See: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Mark 7:20

Wisdom would dictate that when a member is under discipline they be asked by the Board of Elders to discontinue any ministries they are involved in until the board feels they have been fully restored and ready for ministry.

Adherents: Where required and to the degree possible the restorative procedures above will also be applied to non-members encouraging them to return to the Lord from a path of sin they have taken.

We are disciples of Jesus Christ and as such are called to holiness in our lives individually and corporately. May we all sincerely apply the scriptures in these matters accepting the loving correction of our fellow members with joy. May we apply the scriptures in word and in spirit, nothing more and nothing less, so we will be ready for His coming!

## **RESTITUTION GUIDELINES**

Matthew 5:23-24; 6:12; 18:21 - Acts 24:16 -  
1 Timothy 1:5, 19

1. RESTITUTION MUST ALWAYS BE A BLESSING, never a curse or a burden. What God commands you to do will always end in a blessing. It should not be attempted until you are certain it will 'bless'. TIMING is so important. DON'T RUSH RECKLESSLY. We are to EDIFY each other.

2. RESTITUTION RESULTS IN LOVE. It should cause more love for each other than you had before. FULL JOY come when restitution is proper and complete.

3. RESTITUTION IS A MATTER OF OBEDIENCE. Don't sin by disobedience and expect God's blessing. Restitution evidences to man that a transaction has already been made with God. BE COMMITTED to making restitution when needed, in GOD'S TIMING.

4. RESTITUTION SHOULD WAIT FOR GOD TO PREPARE THE WAY. He provides the circumstances to bring restitution about. In some situations there is NO DOUBT or question about immediate action. In others, God needs to take the initiative. Begin by RESTING the case with God. Pray, "Lord, I am personally willing to make restitution and will ALLOW THEE to take the initiative in preparing the way." When He does, ACT accordingly. It is just as important that the Lord prepares the other party to receive you as it is your being willing to go to him. As you are prayerfully "tuned" to Him, God will make it clear. Sometimes the reception may not be to YOUR LIKING, but when you move in God's way, it will be the way HE PLANNED to bring about HIS RESULTS IN HIS TIMING.

5. RESTITUTION PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO MINISTER. Often the other party is in need of a "bridge" on which to cross from his self-centeredness into positive obedience to God. Your example and making the move in his direction may free him to honestly face his own need in a way he has desired but has not been able to fulfill. In some cases merely your

moving toward him "preaches" a powerful and convicting sermon to his soul, though THAT IS NOT YOUR MOTIVATION in going.

6. RESTITUTION IS ALWAYS UNILATERAL, always one-sided. Never look for the other person to take the blame or even share in the blame. Restitution is specifically a matter of settling MY WRONGNESS. It deals only with MY BLAME, MY WRONGNESS, in a given matter and MUST NEVER be related to the possibility that someone else was implicated in my wrong. It is dealing with the attitudes of my own heart that even allow the situation to remain. By understanding MY SOLE RESPONSIBILITY to make restitution, I may move straight to the issue, avoiding the snare of thinking that I must first establish a certain kind of delicate "treaty" with the other party. God's work in another life is HIS BUSINESS, though Satan will tempt me to "share" God's responsibility. Therefore, leave the other party with God. DO YOUR PART. Be assured that if God asks you to do it, He will not only create the circumstances, but He will also PROVIDE THE RESOURCES NEEDED for you to carry it out.

7. RESTITUTION IS NEVER "IF". It is never predicated by the statement, "If I have offended you" or "If I have hurt you." The "Please forgive me IF I have been an offense" type restitution WILL NEVER settle anything or produce God's results. If restitution deals with My blame, then it must be that I HAVE offended, hurt, or allowed a bitterness to remain. It then should be "Please forgive me. I am sorry and ask your forgiveness."

8. RESTITUTION NEVER GUARANTEES OR PRECLUDES A "RIGHT" RESPONSE. At the point you ask forgiveness, you are not responsible or guaranteed a positive, "right" response. Commit that to God.

9. RESTITUTION MUST ALWAYS BE AS BROAD AS THE OFFENSE BUT NEED NEVER BE ANY BROADER THAN THE OFFENSE. Deal with GOD ALONE about PRIVATE SINS of the mind and body. These should never be included in restitution. When the other party KNOWS NOTHING about it, DEAL ONLY WITH GOD. Never say, "I have had some bad thoughts about you" or "I RESENTED YOU" or "I have had LUSTFUL THOUGHTS toward you and I want you to forgive me." Go to the other party ONLY WHEN he clearly knows about the situation. If you have shared these thoughts or feelings with a third party, go to him and let him know you have this right with God. GO NO FURTHER UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Some have "created" thoughts in the other party's mind that were not there previously and "created" a further problem, resulting in continued bitterness and resentment. Private lustful thoughts expressed to the other party can generate these same thoughts in his mind and precipitate a sinful immoral relationship. BE VERY CAREFUL.

Though PRIVATE SINS, some people feel strongly that they "must" say something to the person EVEN THOUGH it is not necessary and he knows nothing about it. If you are strongly compelled that this is necessary, always BE POSITIVE, SPEAK IN LOVE, EDIFY, and make TANGIBLE EXPRESSIONS that confirm your love. Never say, "I am sorry for RESENTING you, please forgive me." Say something like this: "I just want you to know that God has put so much love in my heart for you that I have never loved you more than I do right now. There have been times I SHOULD HAVE loved you more, but I thank God for giving me so much love for you now." Follow with tangible acts that confirm your love for him, build him up and bless his life in Christ.

PERSONAL SINS affecting you and another person must be dealt with at that level alone. PUBLIC SINS affecting a large group or an entire church need to be made right on whatever level of people it affects. Always be AS BROAD AS THE OFFENSE but not any broader.

10. RESTITUTION IS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD. In giving public testimony, restitution brings glory to God ONLY WHEN it exalts what Christ has done rather than MAGNIFYING the situation itself. In the light of everything else discussed, personal testimony can be given. It then is not a matter of "hanging out dirty linen in public," but rather an expression of praise to God's glory in deliverance. Others then rejoice by your testimony in that God has performed a MIRACLE rather than in your elaborating all the details. ONLY WHEN the glory goes to Jesus will people be blessed and the church edified.

IMPORTANT FINAL WORDS:

1. On matters of PERSONAL MORALITY (immorality), BE SURE to consult your pastor or spiritual advisor BEFORE acting in any direction.
2. Never pressure a person to respond. If he is unwilling to forgive, ask him to contact you when he is ready.
3. If the sin occurred BEFORE conversion, deal with everything the HOLY SPIRIT REVEALS.
4. Aside from matters of PERSONAL MORALITY (immorality), the general rule is to deal person-to-person. If impossible, telephone. Letters should be a "last resort".
  2. If you have ANY QUESTION at all about the what, when, how or EVEN IF restitution should be made, CONSULT YOUR PASTOR or spiritual adviser. Don't wish when it is TOO LATE you had gotten the right advice. You cannot always recover the damage.