Who Should Confront Sin?
Galatians 6
BQ070312

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (6:1)

The first responsibility of a spiritual believer who seeks to restore a fallen brother is to help pick him up. When a person stumbles, his first need is to get up, and often he needs assistance in doing it. An integral part of church discipline, therefore, is helping a fallen brother get back on his feet spiritually and morally.

Even if a man is caught in any trespass, he deserves help and encouragement as well as rebuke. **Caught** may imply that the person was actually seen committing the **trespass**, indicating there was no doubt about his guilt. But the Greek verb (*prolambano*) also allows for the idea of the man's being **caught** by the **trespass** itself, as it were. That is the sense of the King James rendering, "overtaken in a fault," and seems appropriate in this context.

That interpretation is also supported by Paul's use of *paraptoma* (**trespass**), which has the basic idea of stumbling or falling. The **man** does not commit the sin with premeditation but rather fails to be on his guard or perhaps flirts with a temptation he thinks he can withstand. Or he simply tries to live his life in his own power and fails, producing a deed of the flesh instead of the fruit of the Spirit.

Responsibility for the discipline of those who stumble, as well as for those who commit more serious sins, rests on the shoulders of church members **who are spiritual. Spiritual** believers 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 fleshly.

It should be noted that, whereas maturity is relative, depending on one's progression and growth, spirituality is an absolute reality that is unrelated to growth. At any point in the life of a Christian, from the moment of his salvation to his glorification, he is either **spiritual**, walking in the Spirit, or fleshly, walking in the deeds of the flesh. Maturity is the cumulative effect of the times of spirituality. But any believer, at any point in his growth toward Christlikeness, can be a **spiritual** believer who helps a sinful believer who has fallen to the flesh.

The spiritually and morally strong have a responsibility for the spiritually and morally weak. "We who

are strong," Paul says, "ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). **Spiritual** believers are to "admonish the unruly encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men" (1 Thess. 5:14).

It is not that **spiritual** believers are to be suspicious and inquisitive. Those are hardly qualities of spirituality. But they will be sensitive to sin whenever and wherever it may appear within the Body and should be prepared to deal with it in the way God's Word prescribes.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery, they reminded Him that the law of Moses required that she be stoned to death. Instead of replying, Jesus bent down and began writing in the sand-perhaps listing sins of which those in the crowd were guilty. "When they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones." When Jesus then asked her if any of her accusers had stayed to condemn her, she replied, "'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go your way: From now on sin no more'" (John 8:3–11).

Jesus was not interested in destroying the woman but in helping her, and that should be the attitude of His followers toward other people, especially toward fellow believers.

Jesus' command "Do not judge lest you be judged" (Matt. 7:1) is often used by Christians to oppose discipline in the church and is sometimes quoted by outsiders in opposing the church's taking strong stands against certain evils. As the context makes clear, however (see vv. 3–5), Jesus was talking about a self-righteous, condemning person who acts as judge, passing sentence on others, since he sees only the best in himself and the worst in everyone else. If such a person confesses and is cleansed of his own sin, the Lord went on to say, he then is qualified to confront his brother with the purpose not to condemn but "to take the speck out of [his] brother's eye" (v. 5). He is then **spiritual** and has the right and even obligation to help his brother overcome a **trespass**.

James's similar warning about judging others is also often used to oppose discipline. But again the context makes clear that in his saying, "Who are you who judge your neighbor?" James was not talking about helping a brother out of a sin but about judgmentally speaking condemnation "against a brother" (James 4:11–12). A Christian who "speaks against a brother" is proud, self-righteous, and cruel. He seeks only to exalt himself by pushing down others. A **spiritual** believer who humbly seeks to **restore** a sinning brother, however, is not speaking against him but serving him in the best possible way.

A pastor once commented, "I have often thought that if I ever fall into a *paraptoma* [**trespass**], I will pray that I don't fall into the hands of those censorious, critical judges in the church. Let me fall into

the hands of barkeepers, streetwalkers, or dope peddlers, because such church people would tear me apart with their long, wagging, gossipy tongues, cutting me to shreds."

Only **spiritual** believers have the wisdom or the right to discipline fellow believers, just as only spiritual believers have the right to leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). Before God, in fact, they do not have the right not to discipline. They are commanded **to restore such a one**. When a church is committed to restoring fallen members, it is on its way to being pure and usable.

Katartizo (to **restore**) literally means to mend or repair and was sometimes used metaphorically of restoring harmony among quarreling factions in a dispute. 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 fame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed" (Heb. 12:12–13).

Spiritual believers **restore** a fallen believer first of all by helping him recognize his **trespass** as a **trespass**. Until a person admits his sin, he cannot be helped out of it. Once he has done that, he must be encouraged to confess his sin before God and turn away from it in repentance, sincerely seeking God's forgiveness.

Restoration of fallen brothers and sisters is always to be done **in a spirit of gentleness**, which is characteristic of those who walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). A Christian who is critical and judgmental as he attempts to help a fallen brother does not show the grace of Christ or help his brother, but instead stumbles himself.

After a church has exercised proper discipline, the members should "forgive and comfort" the one who has been disciplined, "lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:7). He should not be regarded "as an enemy, but [admonished] as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15).

From the caution **each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted**, it is clear that even **spiritual** believers can stumble. They are made of the same stuff as those who have fallen. Because the exhortation **looking to yourself** is so vital, Paul uses a strong word (*skopeo*, to observe or consider) in the present tense, which emphasized a continual, diligent attentiveness to their own purity. They, **too**, could **be tempted** and even fall into the same sin for which they disciplined a brother.

The attitude of every Christian should always be the attitude of Jesus. And when a believer needs to help discipline a fallen brother, he should ask for a special portion of Christ's love and gentleness. If the Father does not want even one of His own to be devastated (Matt. 18:14), and if "the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56), how much less do His followers

have the right to be destructive rather than helpful?

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