

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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## **The Biblical Concept of Restoration**

--By Richard Sprague

"Brothers, if a man is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself; you also may be tempted." (NIV) **Galatians 6:1** The word "restore" in this verse means bringing the person back to the perfected condition from which he had fallen. It is translated "set him right" in the New English Version. Thus to "set him right" means to "restore" him to what is right.

Premise: The Biblical Concept of Restoration in this verse applies to saved individuals who may have sinned and therefore are in need of being restored to their previous forgiven state. It is up to those who remain in the forgiven state to attempt to restore that individual to their previous forgiven state.

**James 5:19-20** refers to this same idea. "19 My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." The word "restore" in this verse is a different word in the original language. It means to "cause him to turn back" so is translated "restore" him to his former condition.

An example of this is seen in **Chapter 5 of I Corinthians** where the Apostle Paul reprimands the entire congregation for allowing an individual to commit the grievous sin of having his father's wife as his own. "1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"

Paul said "put that man out of your fellowship," and "hand this man over to Satan..." This is equivalent to telling them they must not allow that sin to go on. But

the reason to take this action is to bring about the restoration of that man into the fellowship of the forgiven. This is expressed in the next sentence, "so that his *sinful nature (sarkos)* may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." The Interlinear Greek/English New Testament renders this as follows: "for the destruction of the flesh." The word "*sarkos*" is from the Greek "*sarx*" meaning flesh. It does not imply that we are born with a propensity towards sin. Sin is something we learn to do, or not do, as we grow. The purpose for putting him out was to bring him to repent and stop the sin. Then the brothers could restore him to fellowship with the church. This is further explained by Paul in the following verses wherein he refers to the sin as "old yeast" or "leaven".

Note **verse 6**, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?" This naturally refers to the idea that the entire congregation would be infected by the sin of the one man unless they did something about it. He continued in **verse 7**, "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."

The guilty man had fallen from "sincerity and truth" and needed to be restored to it. He had to learn to "put to death his sinful desires" as Paul wrote in **Romans 8:13** when he said "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do *mortify* (put to death, RS) the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (KJV) The man had to learn to control his sinful desires.

Professor Thomas Friskney wrote a commentary on I Corinthians while teaching at Cincinnati Christian College (now C C University). He said about this case, "*The form of discipline is figuratively stated as 'to deliver such a one to Satan.' Though this expression is commonly taken as having reference to the infliction of bodily punishment, the context lends*

more weight for its being in reference to excommunication. In verse 7 Paul says, 'Purge out the old leaven.' In **verse 9** and **verse 11** he stresses 'not to keep company with fornicators.'" (ASV)

Then, in **verse 13**, Paul wraps it up by saying, "Expel the wicked man from your number." This act by the church is, in this modern age, referred to as "excommunication." It is seldom used among many modern denominations yet it is a concept that is clearly stated in this context.

But what does Paul later say about this matter? We refer you to **II Corinthians 2:5ff**, "5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 7 Now instead, you ought **to forgive and comfort** him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, **to reaffirm your love for him**, 9 The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake. 11 In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."

We conclude the man who had been put out from among them had repented and now the rest of the church is to forgive the man of the wrong he had done. Once that forgiveness is given he could be restored to the fellowship and the "excommunication" could be expunged.

Restoration of the individual to the fellowship would then be complete. But it was the responsibility of the entire fellowship of believers under the leadership of the elders to do what was needed to make restoration possible. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "You who are spiritual should restore him gently." The word "restore" refers to returning him to his perfected condition before he so grievously sinned. He had "missed the mark" which is what the word "sin" actually means.

### Restoration Not Limited to Individuals

What we often fail to see is the Biblical concept of Restoration is not limited to individuals who sinned. It is just as applicable to entire bodies of individuals such as churches who have departed from the truth and are in need of being restored to that from which they have fallen if they were ever in it.

An example of this is seen in the letter to the churches in Galatia. Note what Paul wrote to those churches in **Galatians 1:6ff**, "6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Here was a situation wherein not just one congregation, but several, were "deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ..." They were "turning to a different gospel." This "new gospel" was an effort to require Gentiles to meet the requirements of the Law of Moses before they could be baptized and become Christians. The rest of the book of Galatians is Paul's protest to requiring Gentiles to observe the requirements of the Law of Moses before they could be included in the church.

Paul states very clearly that the churches in Galatia had "fallen away from grace." (**5:4**) "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ: you have *fallen away from grace*." When whole congregations have departed from the truth of the Word they need to be restored to the truth from which they have fallen. They had been saved but now they find themselves "alienated from Christ."

Thus Paul wrote to show them the error of their way in his effort to restore them to that from which they had fallen. He went so far as to make it a major part of the discussion with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem when he returned from his mission trip to Galatia. We see this in **Acts 15:4ff** where James reminded the church leaders that God had prophesied the time when Gentiles would be included in God's family. **Verses 16-18** are quoted from **Amos 9:11-12** in which Amos foretold the time when Gentiles would be included in the rebuilt "house of David." This had evidently been overlooked by the churches in Galatia so now the brethren in Jerusalem had to help restore the Galatian churches to the right thinking on this subject. It would be good for the student to read the entire **Chapter 15 in Acts** to get the full understanding of this matter.

The fact is, when whole groups of people turn away from the truth of the Gospel and begin to teach different forms of doctrine, they are "deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ." If and when

that happens they need “restored” to the truth originally taught by Jesus and the apostles.

### Restore Implies Truth From Which One Has Fallen

Whether it is an individual who has sinned, or a group of people who make up denominations who perpetuate division, restoration is needed to return them all to the original gospel and doctrine of Jesus and his apostles. In doing so they would be restored to that one church Jesus built.

The truth revealed by Jesus and the apostles guided by the Holy Spirit is the perfect message we are to believe and preach in order to be the church Jesus said He would build (**Matthew 16:18**). When we see different denominations teaching contrary doctrines that do not come close to resembling what Jesus and the Apostles taught, we need to help “restore them” to the one church for which Jesus died.

As we each come to an understanding of the truth as revealed in the Word of truth, we are then responsible for trying to help bring about restoration to that truth all who no longer teach it. Teaching false doctrine by a denomination is as wrong as the sin of “having his father’s wife.” In essence, the latter may infect a congregation of believers as surely as teaching a gospel that is not the gospel but is a departure from the gospel. Restoration of the erring brother as well as the erring congregation is needed.

### Consider the Seven Churches of Revelation 3 and 4.

The seven churches mentioned in **Revelation Chapters 3 and 4** are examples of what we are talking about in this lesson. Only two of the seven were accepted as being what they were supposed to be. These two were not in need of restoration as they had not slipped into false teachings or other types of sin. However, the five that had fallen in one way or another were in danger of losing their salvation unless they repented and were restored to that perfected condition. Remember the word “restore” includes the idea of being set right or returned to their perfected state from which they had fallen.

The five churches that had not remained faithful in all things had one thing in common. They all needed to restore that which was lacking among them. If they were committing sin they needed to stop. If they were teaching false doctrine or allowing it to be taught, they needed to stop allowing it.

The one word that covers their start towards being restored was the word “repent.” For example, the church at Pergamum stands out in this regard (**Revelation 2:12-17**). Note **verse 15-16**, “15 And you have others who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

This indicates clearly that false teaching must be combated by using the Word of truth mentioned in **Ephesians 6:17**, “... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This is the only way restoration can be accomplished when someone has deserted the truth of the Word.

Repentance is the way towards restoration. But before one can be restored to what has been given up there must be a recognition of what has been lost. The Galatian churches were warned they had fallen away from grace. We are not told in Scriptures what their response was to Paul’s warning but we can certainly conclude they were in the same situation as the five churches in Revelation. If they did not repent of their departure from “the one who called you by the grace of Christ” and return to the original gospel message, they, too, could lose access to God’s grace. But it takes a humble person to recognize and admit to being wrong and be willing to repent and return to the pure form of doctrine from which they had departed. Only when that happens will the person, or the church or groups of churches, find restoration to the truth.

Professor Friskney also wrote a commentary on The Book of Revelation entitled, “*Strength for Victory*”. In this book he wrote the following thoughts regarding the Church at Pergamum.

“Repent therefore; or else I will come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.” (KJV) “Here is their call to repentance. False teaching must be dealt with. Christ, who has the two-edged sword, is the one not only with a message of encouragement to the faithful but also the one with a message of judgment for the false teachers and those deceived by them. As Jesus says, ‘I come quickly,’ and He gives assurance that the due judgment for their sin is **sure**. This fact is more important than **when** it will come.” They must stop false teaching and restore the truth.

Now consider wherein there has been desertion from the grace of the Lord.

Just as the man in Corinth had committed a grievous sin, even so many individuals have done the same or

similar kinds of sin. Paul warned the Christians in **I Corinthians 5:9**, "...not to associate with sexually immoral people of this world..." Read the next verses to get a more complete picture. There is a need for people who fall from grace to repent and seek restoration to the fellowship of the forgiven.

Just as the congregations in Galatia had departed from the pure gospel, even so today many have departed from what the Scriptures reveal as the true gospel. They, too, must repent of their divisive teachings and restore the correct teachings as given in the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Division among believers is wrong. It too must be repented of and unity of the Spirit restored to the churches of today. Jesus prayed that His followers would remain united. **John 17:11** contains this thought, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one."

Truly there is a need for restoration of the unity of the body of Christ "so the world may believe" as Jesus said in **John 17:21**. Please read this and make it your desire to help restore the divided churches to the unity that God wants for the church that He built (**Matthew 16:18, Colossians 1:18**).

The unity of the one church Jesus spoke of in **Matthew 16:18** is seen in **Ephesians 4:3-6**, "3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

There is no room for debate on those subjects listed above. The common word among them is the word "one." One body, i.e. the church, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. This is the "unity of the Spirit" that we are to "make every effort to keep."

### Conclusion

We can safely conclude that there was a truth that was complete in the first century Christian Church. Whenever any person or group of people departed from that truth they needed to repent and be restored to it. It is obvious that Christianity is divided today with various factions competing against each other.

This is contrary to the way Jesus and the apostles taught. There is a need for repentance and a return to

the unity of the body of Christ "so the world may believe."

May the Lord Jesus bless all who will work to restore all believers to that oneness that was what Jesus prayed for "that the world may believe."

That, I conclude, is the Biblical Concept of Restoration. May this short introduction to that concept lead everyone to seriously consider how they may help make it happen.