

RESTORING THE FALLEN

W. L. Totty

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Galatia, said, **“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such as one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”** (Gal. 6:1). That is a command that perhaps all of us are sometimes negligent in obeying.

When a person is overtaken in a fault, even though it may be in that which we think is a small matter, we should be willing and eager to seek to restore such a person. Sometimes, however, we are more prone to criticize that person than to seek to restore him. Yet, Paul tells us to consider ourselves lest we **“also be tempted.”**

It is not enough for us to say: “He ought to know better than to do things that will separate himself from God.” Many children of God, being weak, yield to Satan’s temptation, knowing that in so doing they are not doing the will of God. That which tempts one person may be no temptation to another; yet, it is our obligation to try to encourage and strengthen the weak to turn from sin. We must consider ourselves lest we might **“also be tempted”** to sin in some other way. If not, we might find ourselves as this man whom Paul describes: **“For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself”** (Gal. 6:3). In other words, we are nothing if we try to excuse ourselves by saying the brother who errs knows as much about God’s will as we do; therefore, we are not obligated to try to help him to overcome sin.

When we know of one who has gone astray, we cannot leave it to someone else to restore that one. Every child of God is obligated to do all he can to save someone else, for the apostle Paul said, **“But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden”** (Gal. 6:4-5).

One great weakness on the part of many children of God is a failure to study God’s word in order to communicate it to others. The writer of Hebrews said, **“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat”** (Heb. 5:12). Paul told Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15). If it was necessary that Timothy study to show himself approved by God, by what reasoning would one conclude that we, in this age, are not obligated to study in order to have God’s approbation.

Just reading a chapter in the Bible occasionally is not studying it well. Speaking to the Israelites, God said:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up (Deu. 6:6-7).

Some might be prone to say: “That is commanded in the Old Testament, but we are living by the New Testament.” Though that is true, would it not be just as necessary now to teach God’s new covenant, since it was necessary under the Old Testament to diligently teach God’s law.

And it is not even enough to diligently study the word of God; we must also put it into practice. The apostle James said, **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”** (Jam. 4:17). Also, Jesus said:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Mat. 28:18-19).

It is not even enough just to get people to obey the Lord in baptism, but we must continue to teach them to observe all things commanded of God.

Another of the greatest temptations to which too many members of the church yield is to neglect the assembling of the saints to worship. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Jesus said,

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Mat. 18:12-14).

Jesus compared His followers to sheep. We all know that the duty of a shepherd was to tend the sheep, to protect them from harm, even if it meant that he had to leave those safe in the fold in order to search for one that had gone astray.

Jesus is referred to as the "chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4). He has delegated the task of overseeing His flock here on earth to the elders of the church, as we are told by the apostle Paul when he called the elders of the church at Ephesus to him, saying, "**Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers**" (Acts 20:28). It is the duty of elders to feed the flock, and if some members of the flock forsake the assembling where they can be taught, it is likewise the duty of elders to leave the ninety-nine and go seek those who went astray. They will be held responsible for the souls of those who go astray if no effort is made to restore them.

Many times elders of the church become so engrossed in taking care of the material things pertaining to the church that they are prone to leave undone the "**weightier matters,**" the watching for souls.

Whether we be the most humble member of the church or an elder, let us put first things first, putting into practice that which is commanded us of God, meeting to worship him, teaching others the will of God, and restoring the fallen.~

Deceased