

HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE FAULTS

Galatians 6:1 reads: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." But how do you know if you're spiritual or not? And once you do know, how do you go about "restoring" your erring brother?

What does it really mean to be "spiritual"? "Spirituality" can mean different things to different people. Some think the mark of a spiritual person is somber clothing — black suit, white shirt (maybe with the collar turned around backwards), and dark square-toed shoes. To others, the mark of real spirituality is a certain type of speech, liberally laced with expressions like "thine," "thou," "brother and sister," and "Praise the Lord." Others feel that a truly "spiritual" person is one who would never laugh too much.

The Bible Definition. But are these outward signs marks of real spirituality? What is the Bible's definition? Romans 8:6 reads: "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but *to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you."

Notice, to "set the mind on the flesh is death," but "to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." In other words, to be physically minded, to think like the average, normal run-of-the-mill human being, is death. As Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 state, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." But in contrast, to "set the mind on the Spirit," to be truly spiritual, is *to live in a way that produces life.*

But how does one go about producing life? Is there an example to follow?

We would all have to admit that if anyone in the whole of human history was spiritual, that someone was Jesus Christ. He was spiritual when He walked this earth in the flesh and is now spiritual in His totality. Christ announced that His purpose, His reason for being here, was so that we could "have *life*, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Christ's whole intent, His whole purpose and ministry, was to do the things that produced life for others. His life was "an *example*, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). So a truly spiritual person will follow Christ — and do the things that produce life in himself and others.

The Practical Application. But what exactly was Christ's approach? What specific things is a person supposed to do to produce this kind of life? It has a lot to do with how one relates to other human beings who have faults and shortcomings.

And who is utterly without faults? Human beings, seeing a person with a fault, don't often react with total spirituality. The natural reaction is not to consider how to help this person do the things that produce life — far from it!

Suppose you or I come across a person who has a fault; not a minor fault like clipping his fingernails in church when he ought to be listening, but a really big one. Maybe he drinks too much, or is a fornicator, or a thief, or maybe he stretches the truth, or is the worst gossip who ever bit air. You know what the natural response to such a person tends to be? A feeling of superiority — thoughts like "I'm above that kind

of thing!" Indignation. Looking down the nose. Disgust. Avoidance. Even loathing and hatred — or joy in finding another juicy tidbit to pass along the grapevine.

To illustrate the point: Say there is in your neighborhood or your church congregation a young lady, perhaps a teenage girl. She has been going out with the wrong crowd, perhaps drinking too much, and she's gotten herself in trouble.

What is your reaction? Would it be hard for you to accept someone like that? Could you treat her just like you would any other Christian sister who has sinned (and how many human beings do you know who haven't?). Now maybe she hasn't come up and given a confessional in front of the entire congregation, beating her chest and rolling in the dust or maybe throwing ashes in the air. But she *has* gone before her God in a private place of prayer and repented in bitterness and tears.

Now, be honest with yourself. What would your reaction be?

Who Is Without Sin? Once you've honestly answered the above question, compare your projected behavior to that of Jesus Christ in a similar situation. John 8 records how Christ was accosted by a group of super-righteous scribes and Pharisees in the Temple. They brought before Him a woman who had been "caught in adultery." Now you wonder how these fellows happened to catch her, but that's beside the point. Trying to trap Christ into contradicting the Mosaic law, they inquired: "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" And Jesus, in His wisdom, at first ignored them, but finally replied: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And when they heard this, "they went away, one by one..."

Then what did Christ do? Did He say: "Woman, you've really sinned — and we're going to put you on the rack and stretch you from here to next Sunday! And you're going to pay! Boy, are you going to pay! You're going to wish you'd never done that!" That's not what He said, is it?

If there was anyone on the face of this earth who would have been justified in putting that woman to death, it would have been God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. But this illustrates that punishment was *not* what Jesus Christ desired. That wasn't His purpose. He said rather: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

He didn't spend hours counseling her, but He did give some very suc-

cinct advice *that would produce life*. He said to go and live in the way that produces not only fun and enjoyment and happiness in this life, but life forever. He didn't look down His nose. He didn't stand up in righteous indignation and pull up His robes and start running toward the hills screaming, "Sin! Sin!" He didn't go to the Pharisees and stand on the corner in the marketplace and begin to spread the whole story all over Jerusalem. He did what was best for her at that time — He extended *mercy and kindness and forgiveness*.

Does God Delight in Punishment? What would *your* reaction have been? How does it compare? We as human beings like to see "justice" done. We like to see people punished, especially if the fault or sin has somehow impinged on our freedom, hurt us, or taken something away from us. The natural reaction is, "Boy, I hope they get theirs!"

Here is another illustration: Say someone you know has been gossiping about you for years. You can't make a false move without it being broadcast all over the county.

Then this individual goes on vacation one year, and comes back to find his home has been broken into. Burglars have walked off with everything up to and including the kitchen sink. You hear about it, and you get this inward feeling of glee. You're bubbling over with happiness and comfort and joy in their adversity. God has finally avenged you.

But is that the way God works? He does *allow* a lot of things to happen — time and chance happen to everybody. But God says He doesn't even take delight in the death of a wicked person. It doesn't make Him happy to see misfortune happen to anyone. He says: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked *turn from his way and live*" (Ezek. 33:11).

The basic point is that God's primary purpose is not punishment for wrongdoing. He didn't create humanity with the potential for evil, just so He could sit on the edge of His throne with some sort of spiritual fly swatter waiting to go swoof! "gotcha!" everytime somebody gets a little out of line. But sometimes we human beings reason this way.

We don't think of punishment like God does. God uses punishment as a tool — as mercy. He allows punishment to take place to get an individual to look at his or her actions and evaluate them.

When people find themselves in a tight situation, they don't like it. Their next logical step is to sit down and try to figure out what went wrong — what they did to produce the situation they are in. Maybe the situation isn't their fault — but then again maybe they can say, "I did this, and I did that, and now I'm in this great, huge, ugly mess that won't go away." God wants that person to stop and think about the way they are living, and to repent and start living His way.

That is the main reason for punishment -- to cause pain, because without pain we would all continue living the way that produces eternal death. So the pain is there, but it's there to produce life.

How to Help. Now how can we apply God's thinking to our relationships with other people? Suppose we see someone "overtaken in a trespass" (Gal. 6:1). He's not in that position because God wants to provide us with entertainment — so we can watch him squirm. God doesn't get delight out of that and neither should we.

God says that if we are spiritually minded we are going to go about trying to *restore* that individual, "looking to ourselves lest we too be tempted." And being spiritually minded means asking yourself if what you are about to say or do with regard to that individual is something that is going to help produce eternal life for him or her. If you see someone with a fault, and your basic interest is helping, serving and seeing that person obtain eternal life, then go ahead and try to help them. But if it's not — if it's anger, or superiority, or disgust, or anything like that — then be careful, because perhaps you have no business interfering. Just get out of the way, and let someone who *is* spiritual (perhaps God or another human being) step in and try to help them.

To recap: God is spiritual. If we are spiritual, we will think the same

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way God does, have the same purpose He has. And what is that purpose? God is interested in *sharing His life*, enlarging his family, bringing us all from this human plane to the God plane where we can live forever with Him and share what He has to share. That's His interest; that's His motive and intent; that's His purpose in life now. That's why Jesus Christ came and died.

If you have any other purpose than that, and claim that you are spiritual, then there is something wrong with your reasoning. Because everything that God is doing for you, and has done, is being done with that purpose in mind. And that's the end result He expects — you in the Kingdom, and your brother there too.

So, when you see your brother

overtaken in a fault, ask yourself: "Do I really seek his good? Am I concerned about his eternal life? Is that why I'm getting involved? Is that why I'm thinking what I'm thinking?" If you can answer yes to those questions, and have this as your overriding purpose, then you can go ahead and help point your brother in the direction that leads to life. □

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