

“If Any Man Be Overtaken ...”

“Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in a trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). For all practical purposes, Paul has concluded his “doctrinal appeal” to these brethren whose actions caused him alternatively to marvel and agonize. Although he does refer to the problem again at the chapter’s end (6:13-16); in verses 1-10 he continues a personal appeal to their personal behavior which appeal commenced in chapter 5:13 as he contrasted the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The first ten verses of chapter six are appeals to individuals as to how we must conduct ourselves while we live in the flesh. Verse one contains instructions as to how those who fall into sin are to be reclaimed.

“If a man be overtaken in a trespass.” The word “overtaken” carries the thought of surprise: one is surprised into a trespass. Our adversary is crafty and among the many devices he uses to ensnare us is to thrust us into situations in which we act hastily. Oh how often after reflecting on past behavior we lament that we did not take time to think of what we were doing! Something happened which caused us to “flare up” with the usual course of saying or doing the wrong thing. The aggressor knows the advantage in the element of surprise -- and our great enemy is a master at beguiling us. Cain was warned, *“If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? but if thou dost not well, behold sin coucheth at the door ...”* (Gen. 4:7). The Lord likened sin to a lion or panther, lying in wait for us. In another passage, the Holy Spirit spoke of some who *“lie in wait to deceive.”* And so, in the heat of an argument or the sudden, strong arousal of desire, we succumb. Surprised into sin -- finding that we have done something we did not intend to do. When such happens, we may become ashamed, and with that shame, embarrassment. And with our embarrassment we may be tempted to cease efforts to do what is right. It is at such points that others need to help in our restoration.

But, when it is apparent we need to be restored, spiritual brethren are needed to effect that. Alas, often people try to “restore” one overtaken in a trespass who only succeed in making bad matters worse. The “spiritual brother” is characterized by Paul as possessing two important attitudes.

“In a spirit of gentleness ...” The Lord did severely rebuke some He met in life, but He did so when all other recourses proved fruitless. Jesus said, *“I am meek and lowly in heart”* (Mat. 1:29). A haughty, “holier than thou” spirit is not likely to be successful. How much effect do you think the Pharisee of Luke 18 would have had on the publican in that parable Jesus gave?

The Pharisee prayed, *"God, I thank you that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I get"* (Lk. 18:11). And, he who is spiritual *"looks to himself, lest he also be tempted."* Paul realized his own weaknesses and although he had crucified himself so that he no longer lived, rather, Christ lived in him, he was still in the flesh (Gal. 2:20). He remembered that Jesus said, *"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Mat. 26:41). Because of all this, Paul said, *"I buffet my body and bring it into subjection lest by any means after that I have preached to others, I myself might be rejected"* (1 Cor. 9:27).

So, when I fall into sin, restore me. But, please, do so in a spirit of gentleness, placing yourself in my state, lest otherwise I further resent your prideful approach and fall further into sin. Next: "Bear Ye One Another's Burdens."

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