**Restoring A Soul**

*by Harry Osborne*

In competitive events, it is not unusual to see opposing parties wishing disaster upon each other. I have yet to see a middle linebacker cry because he decked the opposing quarterback hard enough to knock him out of the game. In this area, I have not noted much sorrow from Thunder fans when Kevin Durant puts up an air ball. In the business world, the cut-throat mentality seems to be accepted as a part of the corporate ladder climbing game. When the one on top falls, the next one is more than happy to take his place without much mourning over the associate's lot. Competition is healthy in various aspects of life, but we need to beware of the general belief that good will come to us as a result of another's disaster – especially in spiritual matters.

When disaster comes upon one in the spiritual realm, it means that a soul is in danger of eternal condemnation. ***A lost soul benefits no one.*** When one falls through Satan's devices into sin, no one is better off. Yet, those who would claim to be Christians sometimes seem to rejoice at the fall of a brother or sister in Christ. It is a sad fact that news of another's sin has occasionally been spread with glee among some Christians. Please notice the emphasized words. I do not believe such is the normal practice among brethren, but it has been known to happen. I recall a case of two people who had a continuing feud in one congregation. When one of the two was caught in a sin, the other hit the phone to help spread the "juicy news" and further embarrass the first. The practice of such gossip seems to be increased when the sin is one of a sexual nature. If the sinner is in a place of leadership, the urge to gossip seems to grow larger. Instead of sorrowing over the fact that a soul is in danger, lives have been ruined, and great damage has been done to the cause of our Lord; a few seem to delight in spreading the details of such tragedies. ***No sin should serve as the kindling for a fire of gossip, nor should any sinner be the wood consumed for the glee of another's self-promoting tongue!***

A few examples in Jesus' teaching should serve to declare His disgust with such behavior. Examine the case of the elder brother upon the return of the prodigal (Luke 15:11-32). After the prodigal had repented and had been forgiven of his sins, the elder brother sought to rehash the sordid past of the prodigal's sins with harlots. Even though the prodigal had left such sinful relationships and had humbled himself in repentance, the elder brother desired to benefit from his father by bringing it up again. Jesus even directed one of His parables "unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought" (Luke 18:9). The Pharisee of the story was quick to notice and confess the sins of others, particularly those of the publican. As he compared himself with the publican, the Pharisee was lifted up in pride. He did not seek, as did the publican, the forgiveness of God and transformation of his life to the instructions of the divine standard (Romans 12:1-2). Obviously, Jesus despises the practice of rejoicing over the sins of another.

#### Responsibilities in Restoring Souls

We have seen how we should not react towards the sins of another, but what should we do? The apostle Paul addresses that question:

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself* (Galatians 6:1-3).

If we are indeed "spiritual" ones, our place is to restore the brother or sister who has been defeated in a battle with sinful passions. Instead of looking down our noses at our brother or sister, we should consider what it would be like if we were in his/her place and see that such a scenario is possible. If we are certain of our own invulnerability to such sin, we have deceived ourselves and our fall may be imminent (1 Corinthians 10:12). We must strive to help our brethren with the load of temptation under which they fell. This our duty commanded by God!

Since God gave us the obligation of restoring others, we should seek to follow His example in fulfilling that task. After Israel had sinned against God in every imaginable way, God still offered restoration through the message of His prophet in Isaiah 57. He promised, *"For thus says the High and Lofty One, Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones’"* (Isaiah 57:15). God's actions towards Israel were aimed at bringing such humility and contrition so that He might "**restore** *comforts"* unto them (Isaiah 57:18). God's actions towards man have always been governed by that goal - **restoration** of the humble and contrite.

Is that not also the goal He desires us to pursue with the brother or sister overtaken in a sin? A good example of the principle is seen in the way God declared the fornicating brother of 1 Corinthians 5 was to be handled. The faithful brethren were told to *"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,* ***that his spirit may be saved*** *in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 5:5). Paul goes on to state that the same method was to be used for other cases where one refused to leave a sinful practice (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

One might say that such cannot be done in the *"spirit of gentleness"* previously instructed (Galatians 6:1). However, when Paul commands the same thing of the Thessalonians, he adds, *"Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Thessalonians 3:15). Thus, God declares that congregational discipline can and must be done in a spirit showing our brotherly affection towards one overtaken in sin. The aim of such action ought to mirror God's goal – restoration of the humble and contrite.

When the brother of 1 Corinthians 5 responded in humility and contrition to the action taken, the next step in restoration needed to be taken. Paul gave these instructions to the church:

*This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man,****7****so that, on the contrary,* ***you ought rather to forgive and comfort him****, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you* ***to reaffirm your love to him*** (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

It was time for them to help the brother grow in service to Christ, reassured by their love. A soul had been saved from death and a multitude of sins covered (James 5:19-20). They were to act accordingly.

#### Conclusion

The same principles should govern our actions today. When one of a truly humble and contrite heart turns from sin and ceases the sinful actions, God covers the sin and remembers it no more. Who are we to dig up the sin again, chew on the past, and regurgitate the details? Let us help *"lift up the hands that hang down"* and heal the lame (Hebrews 12:12-13). If our focus is on restoration, such action will be the natural course to take. If our natural tendency is in any other direction, we need to take a long look at ourselves and then act to restore proper motivation and action to our own life.