

MENDING BROKEN BROTHERS GALATIANS 6:1, 2

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”¹

The Ministry of Restoration is committed to the Body of Christ. This vital ministry is far too important to be entrusted to one particular group or to just one individual within the church, so it is given to the entire community of faith. Pastors may neglect it. Deacons may ignore it. The church, however, must practise the ministry of mending broken brothers.

Perhaps you have noticed that Paul seldom addressed church leaders in his missives. Usually he addressed his letters to a particular church, or in those few instances where he wrote to the churches situated within a particular region he would address the missive in collective fashion. Though interspersed among the teachings presented within his letters are instructions directed specifically to elders, his instructions are ultimately addressed to the entire assembly.

This observation emphasises that the Apostle’s words were intended to be binding upon each individual Christian. All Christians are responsible to know the Word and the will of God, whether speaking of individual responsibilities or speaking of responsibilities imposed on elders. There are no secret teachings hidden within the New Testament. God has spoken openly so that everyone bears equal responsibility before Him for the knowledge communicated. This is not to say that every Christian bears equal responsibility to implement a particular teaching, but it is to acknowledge that each member of the congregation is responsible to know the teachings of the Word and each one is responsible to hold one another accountable for those truths.

Thus, each member of the congregation is responsible for the ministry of restoration. Each member of the church bears responsibility before God to mend fellow members who may be broken. Collectively, whatever we do as a congregation to heal the hurting among us is a reflection of the acceptance of individual responsibility for mending the broken among us. Let’s unite our hearts and our minds in order to learn of the ministry of mending broken brothers.

THE MINISTRY OF RESTORATION — “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” Galatians is addressed to churches that were situated within the Roman Province of Galatia [see **GALATIANS 1:2**]. Paul stressed one primary truth in the brief instructions presented in today’s text—we are each responsible for one another. Refusal to accept this responsibility is evidence that an individual is not spiritual.

The prevailing view among the churches of this day appears to be that the church is an organisation. Thus, the church is viewed much the same as any social organisation or fraternal club. The perception seems to be that one joins a church by sitting through a membership class and then making a formal application which is approved or denied by an official board. Such a concept fails to find witness in the Word of God. Where within the Word of God does one find a board? The only boards to be discovered in the Word of God were flotsam and jetsam awash upon the sea following a shipwreck [see **ACTS 27:44**]. No membership class, no formal application for membership is discovered in the Word of God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The definitive passage for this point must yet be **ACTS 2:41**. This is the divine record of the first intake of members into the Jerusalem church following the descent of the Holy Spirit. “Those who believed what Peter said were baptised and added to the church that day—about three thousand in all.”² The requirement of membership classes in order to be added to the congregation is a human invention. Applications for membership and the need for approval by a board are human inventions unsupported by the Word of God. Measures such as these are required when we adopt the political model advocated by the world instead of receiving the biblical concept of the church as a living Body. Under the biblical view those added to the church are responsible to the church to invest their gifts and lives in that Body to which they are added. Those who are part of the Body bear accountability to one another.

Let me restate the proposition. If the church is a political entity, membership classes and formal applications will be required for admission to the assembly. If, on the other hand, the church is a living organisation, God adds to the Body members as He pleases; and those He adds are responsible to submit to the greater assembly. Consequently, in the political model accountability is to the board which admits or oversees membership; and such accountability is likely to be sporadic and/or casual in administration. If, on the other hand, the church is a living entity, accountability is immediate and ongoing. Discipline in the case of the political model falls under the purview of a hierarchy or oligarchy (a board or committee or even the pastoral staff). In the case of the biblical model discipline becomes the responsibility of the entire Body.

The importance of this particular point will become apparent as we continue our study of the text underlying the message this day. The message presents the ministry of reconciliation as a ministry for which the membership, individually and collectively, bears responsibility. However, we must move beyond the political model to reinstate the biblical model in order to fully appreciate this particular ministry of the Body.

Some may argue that since we must meet the laws of the province or of the nation that we are compelled to adopt the political model; however, as a church of the Lord Jesus our first loyalty is to Him and to the Word which He has given. Fortunately, because we are situated on Canadian soil we are not compelled to violate our conscience in order to fulfil the will of God as revealed in His Word. However, we must consider the consequences of adopting either the political model or the biblical model especially as it relates to the ministry of restoration.

The political model can only coerce or exclude, whereas the biblical model seeks to restore. It is this latter concept which becomes our focus as we consider the passage before us. Church discipline at its heart seeks restoration instead of punishment. The church cannot punish a member; the church must make every effort to restore errant members. Only when restoration efforts have failed may errant individuals be considered to have demonstrated their lack of relationship to the Body and thereafter be considered to be pretenders and not fellow saints.

I recognise that the Greek word *epitimía*, translated “punishment” in many translations, occurs in **2 CORINTHIANS 2:6**. However, the church must be careful to exhibit a godly mindset when disciplining an errant saint. This is chastisement which holds out hope of restoring a fallen saint to a life of godly usefulness, a most divine precept. In submission to Christ the church is to endeavour to seek reconciliation of wayward sheep; the church must always seek restoration of fallen members. When the church ceases to seek restoration, it ceases to be spiritual.

² **Holy Bible: New Living Translation** (Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL 2013)

In the text before us, the Apostle deals with a hypothetical case of a Christian who is *caught in any transgression*, or better, is *caught by a transgression*. The imagery this word would have created in the mind of the first readers of this letter would be that someone was running from sin, but sin, being faster, overtakes and catches him.

It is important that you understand that Paul doesn't present this as an instance of presumptuous sin, but rather he is presenting the case of an individual who makes a misstep. The person is endeavouring to live according to the Faith, but she stumbles—she makes a mistake which can only be viewed as sin. She was snared through her own lack of caution. Perhaps in her weakness or in the heat of a moment she makes a decision which results in sin. This is not an excuse for or a concession to sin, it is rather recognition of the subtle nature of our adversary and acknowledgement of our own weakness.

Two passages show how the legalists respond to such sin. The first reads: “The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So, what do you say?’” [JOHN 8:3-5]? This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. Why the man who was with her wasn't also seized is left to speculation. Nevertheless, the scribes and the Pharisees drag this hapless woman before Jesus and insist that He make a pronouncement declaring her either guilty or innocence. You know very well that their purpose was to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.

Another example is given as Doctor Luke records the account detailing how Paul, at the recommendation of the Jerusalem elders, went to the Temple to participate in the purification rites of some men who had taken a vow. “When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple” [ACTS 21:27-29].

In either instance, legalistic individuals endeavoured to force either Jesus or Paul to submit to the decidedly selective views of the legalists. The Pharisees were quite prepared to have the woman caught in adultery stoned—especially if they could embarrass Jesus. They imagined that Jesus would be compelled to either agree with them, in which case they could trumpet his lack of compassion, or He would be compelled to disagree in which case they could charge that He had no regard for Moses' Law. In the case involving Paul, Jewish worshippers assumed that since he fellowshiped with Gentiles he was guilty of desecrating the Temple precincts. In either instance the legalists were selective in application though making broad accusations against those whom they disliked or distrusted.

Legalists have a field day with selective application of God's law. Their intent appears to be to impose their own will on others instead of restoring them. Punishment seems more important in the eyes of too many religious people than does restoration. The Pharisees and the scribes never considered the matter of fairness when they seized the woman. The Jewish worshippers jumped to a flawed conclusion when they seized Paul and raised an alarm. For the sake of purity, wouldn't you think that restoring a fallen saint would be of greater value to the testimony of the church than is punishment of that saint? Why, then, do so many saints first attempt to punish instead of seeking reconciliation and restoration as God teaches?

Christians are called to restore the fallen saint. The word *katartízo* (translated “restore”) in secular Greek refers to “setting broken bones,” while in the New Testament the word is also used for “mending fishing nets.” It becomes apparent, then, that the assembly is responsible to heal broken believers, to mend torn saints. Take careful note, however, that the task of restoration is not to be undertaken by fledglings in the faith. Rather, according to the text, such a delicate task must be entrusted to those who are spiritual. This is apparent when Paul writes, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, *you who are spiritual should restore him?*” In writing this, the Apostle restricts this vital ministry to members who are qualified as spiritual. In light of the verses that speak of the fruit of the Spirit preceding the text, this would imply that immature believers should not undertake this ministry.

This vital ministry of restoration of the wounded is to be entrusted to believers who walk by the Spirit, saints who are mature in the Faith. Those who walk by the Spirit will exhibit certain recognised spiritual characteristics which are detailed in the Word as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control” [see GALATIANS 5:22, 23]. It becomes apparent that not only should those who take on the task of restoration be spiritual, they must also be mature in the Faith. According to what is written elsewhere, mature Christians are believers who have advanced to solid food and who through constant use of the Word have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil [cf. HEBREWS 5:13, 14].

Don’t assume that restoration must routinely be committed to a board or a committee. The church must ensure that those Christians assuming the task of restoration are spiritual. The church must guard against unspiritual and immature Christians undertaking this task of restoration. Permit me to say in clarification of this concept that this neglected restriction is not meant simply to assign additional work to spiritual people. It should be the goal of every Christian to become spiritual, to discover the fruit of the Spirit in increasing measure evidenced in each individual life.

Ideally, any member of the church could undertake the ministry of restoration; but we do not occupy an ideal world. I assuredly encourage each listener to so grow in grace that he or she is equipped to restore broken brothers. Likewise, I caution each believer to guard the heart so he or she does not presume against the Spirit of God. Just because you are incensed by a particular action does not mean that you are qualified to act to restore the one who is broken.

Again, considering the ideal, the ministry of reconciliation will always be undertaken in openness. However, those restoring the broken must avoid deliberate efforts to embarrass or taking any action that will further injure an otherwise wounded saint. We must acknowledge the power of sin without destroying the one enmeshed in the devil’s snare. The church should act with dispatch in this instance to ensure that the one ensnared is not destroyed but that spiritual men and women come alongside to restore.

This admonition is only reasonable. We do not destroy our children when they disappoint us in our families. Neither may we reject our brothers and sisters when they stumble and disappoint us in the Family of God. When we reach out in love we will likely discover penitent souls who rejoice in the knowledge that they are not rejected. Because we love them enough to hold them accountable, despite the fact their wounds, they will respond in love to our initiative motivated by and revealing love. Our entire effort is to build up, not to destroy; and the building up demonstrates the Spirit of Christ in our midst.

THE MANNER OF RESTORATION — “Restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” This delicate work of restoration must be done gently. As you review **GALATIANS 5:22**, note that the eighth and penultimate fruit of the Spirit is “gentleness.” The spiritual fruit that is presented is progressively dependent—that is, each listed aspect of that fruit builds upon the previously named aspect. Joy follows love and precedes peace. Likewise, peace forms the foundation for patience, which in turn is necessary for kindness, and so forth until at last the child of God exhibits gentleness. That word translated gentleness is *praûtes*, the identical word used in the text before us. Restoring a broken saint requires that the one restoring be gentle. The assumption is that the spiritual fruit of gentleness is resident thus permitting gentle restoration.

The work of restoration must not be done in anger or with heated emotion. There is too often found within the church some who see a fall as occasion to promote themselves. They triumph in a Christian’s falls instead of responding with humility and mourning over a broken brother or sister. Many needful admonitions lose their efficacy by being delivered with choler or intended only to punish the offender. When such admonitions are managed with calmness and tenderness, appearing to proceed from sincere affection and concern for the welfare of those to whom they are given, they are likely to make a good impression. Certainly, the admonition which proceeds from a heart of love is more likely to be heeded than that which is delivered in the heat of the moment.

The admonition of **PROVERBS 24:17, 18** is too readily ignored by Christians in this day.

“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles,
lest the LORD see it and be displeased,
and turn away his anger from him.”

How is it that even within the church some always appear to seek opportunity to injure a fellow saint instead of endeavouring to lift up the injured believer? Can it really be true that some among us secretly rejoice when a fellow Christian stumbles? Shouldn’t we rather grieve and mourn at the loss of spiritual vigour in one who shares this holy Faith? How can we even consider a fellow Christian to be an enemy? No doubt we need to again hear the Word of God teaching us, “Let us not pass judgement on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” [**ROMANS 14:13**].

Whenever an individual comes to you bearing a slanderous report concerning a fellow Christian, whether the one bearing the tale is a fellow worshipper or not, she is unspiritual. Whenever a member of this assembly insinuates evil on the part of a fellow believer or questions the motive for the actions of other worshippers, you may be assured that such a person is not spiritual. The best that can be said of that one is that they are earthly, worldly, unspiritual. Focus on the words of James which speak to this very point. “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [**JAMES 5:19, 20**]. Turning a sinner from the error of his way is not accomplished through slander and gossip and innuendo; rather, this is accomplished through firm insistence upon doing what is right and through endeavouring to build up the weak instead of tearing them down.

Perhaps we Christians have forgotten the cautionary words found in the Hebrews letter. “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed” [HEBREWS 12:12, 13]. Don’t we have responsibility to build one another in the Faith instead of attempting to further injure a fellow Christian? I am pleading with Christians to be spiritual; and as spiritual men and women I plead with God’s people to restore broken brothers gently. We cannot afford to permit a single saint to fall wounded and fail to restore them.

We will assuredly sacrifice spiritual integrity if we choose to be harsh and unloving toward the wounded among us—and we shall always have some who have been wounded. We, ourselves, may be the wounded the next time. This alone is sufficient reason to be gentle! We are warned, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. What can this mean other than each one is susceptible to falling. There is no facet of our life that is not at risk if the evil one should attack.

I recognise that Christians sometimes are overly eager for fellow saints to be “disciplined.” *Discipline* has too often been a buzzword for *punishment* within far too many of Christ’s Assemblies. I am not arguing against discipline for members who are disobedient to Christ; however, those who claim to have been offended often fail to demonstrate sufficient maturity to fulfil the command of the Saviour. When this is the situation, the case for discipline becomes a moot point.

Whether discipline should be imposed or not is no longer an issue when immature saints lead the charge. Attempting discipline in anger compounds the sin and destroys the church. Godly discipline always has the dual effect of demonstrating purity and of drawing the errant saint back to the path of repentance. Paul wrote the Corinthian saints, “If anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So, I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” [2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11].

Gentleness does not mean that the congregation is given the luxury of ignoring sin; rather, gentleness demands humility before a fellow Christian’s brokenness. Paul cautions, “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” He is counselling Christians, and especially Christian leaders, to be humble before the broken brother. Humility is demanded both because it is a fellow saint who has stumbled and also because we ourselves are susceptible to falling.

These truths must not be neglected. We must always bear in mind that we are dealing with a fellow believer. We are not the Judge of souls, we are but fellow workers with Christ. Moreover, we dare not pretend that we are would never succumb to the identical sins. Though the Spirit of God does live within the child of God, we are yet fallen creatures. Jude is correct in warning, “Show mercy to some people who have doubts. Take others out of the fire, and save them. Show mercy mixed with fear to others, hating even their clothes which are dirty from sin”³ [JUDE 22, 23].

³ The Everyday Bible: New Century Version (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

There is one significant issue which continues to crop up even among the faithful. It is a distressingly easy matter to fail to protect the reputation of those who are broken. Part of treating a broken brother or sister with gentleness is protecting them by refusing to gossip about what might be wrong or to speak with outsiders concerning the wounds they may have experienced during the battles of life. The fellow saint will feel himself or herself savaged by the mere fact that he or she has been wounded and is fallen. Surely, we each have responsibility to guard against further injury to the wounded warrior. Friendly fire is as devastating as is the battle which saw the believer wounded in the first place. Let each of us take seriously our responsibility to protect our fellow saint.

I confess a deep animosity against the gossip who insinuates herself or himself among the people of God. Hiding behind the guise of piously asking for prayer for a wounded Christian, she reveals far more than is necessary concerning the wound and how the fallen has erred. Far too many Christians are guilty of destroying the people of God through ill-advised complaints of matters of which they have incomplete knowledge. Everyone has an opinion, but discussing your opinions or complaining about some action taken by the mature is the depth of cowardice. Such talk is craven and wicked, motivated by the evil one rather than being an act of concern. Among the detestable sins growing out of a godless society is gossip. Paul says of those who begin the downward arc of cultural destruction, “They are gossips” [ROMANS 1:29a].

Throughout the Proverbs are statements condemning gossip and slander. Listen to a few:

“The words of a gossip are like delicious morsels;
they go down into a person’s innermost being.”⁴

[PROVERBS 26:22]

“A perverse person spreads dissension,
and a gossip separates the closest friends.”⁵

[PROVERBS 16:28]

“The one who reveals secrets is a constant gossip;
avoid someone with a big mouth.”⁶

[PROVERBS 20:19]

“A contrary man spreads conflict,
and a gossip separates close friends.”⁷

[PROVERBS 16:28]

Gossip is clearly condemned when Paul wrote, “I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:20].

⁴ The NET Bible First Edition (Noteless), (Biblical Studies Press, 2005)

⁵ NET Bible, Ibid.

⁶ The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version. (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

⁷ HCSB, Ibid.

An essential truth that must never be forgotten is this—*Even in the act of discipline we must always bear in mind that we are dealing with brothers*. Otherwise, what do you suppose Paul's instructions in the second letter to the Thessalonians mean? "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" [2 THESSALONIANS 3:14, 15]. Do not regard that one being disciplined as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. This is true gentleness that reveals our spiritual maturity.

Even when warning the Corinthian saints because of their froward attitude, Paul was adamant that he sought to be gentle toward them. Listen to the Apostle. "What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:21]? There is no glee in the apostolic threat of sternness toward these whom he loved. Just so, there can never be joy at the thought of the process leading to the restoration of a broken brother. Though the completed act no doubt holds the promise of joy—both for the one disciplined and for the assembly—the need to confront the situation resulting from the victory of sin and the thought of the need to build up that fellow Christian is painful. Extricating the wounded from the morass of sin is painful business, but the results of the restoration hold sweet promise of divine glory for all who have been touched by the sin.

There is yet another issue to consider as we seek to restore broken saints. Those called upon to restore broken brothers must always be aware that no one is immune from falling into sin. A very good reason why all restoration of those wounded by sin should be done with meekness is given in the latter part of GALATIANS 6:2: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." We must ensure that we deal gently with those who have been overtaken by sin because none of us know but that at another time it may be our own case which is under review by the church; we also may be tempted and succumb to temptation. Therefore, when we are aware of our own proclivity toward sin we will be disposed to treat others as we would desire to be treated should we ourselves stumble. It is appropriate for each of us to recall the stern warning given in 1 CORINTHIANS 10:12: "Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!"

THE MAGNIFICENCE OF RESTORATION — "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." I encourage you to associate this particular verse with another exceptional verse. "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" [ROMANS 15:1]. Isn't it amazing that those thought of as spiritually strong are frequently the most prone to withdraw from dirtying their hands with the weak and injured among the flock. Grasp this singular truth: those who are truly strong are also those who are spiritual; those who think of themselves as strong are responsible to carry the burdens of others.

Contrast this **SECOND VERSE** with the **FIFTH VERSE**. Some imagine that Paul is engaged in stultiloquy. On the one hand, he commands that we carry each other's burdens; then, he insists that each one should carry his own load. Superficially this seems to be gibberish, babbling. However, I urge you to carefully weigh what the Apostle has said. Two separate thoughts are being presented for mature Christians. For review purposes remember that in **VERSE TWO** the Apostle speaks of "bear[ing] one another's burdens" [*báros*]. In **VERSE SIX**, on the other hand, he reminds us that each one should carry his own load [*phortíon*]. The apparent contradiction is clarified through appeal to some contemporary translations. Listen to this passage from two different translations, each of which captures the dynamic contrast between the two thoughts.

First, notice the translation of **GALATIANS 6:1-5** as given in the **NEW CENTURY VERSION**. “Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something wrong, you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin, too. By helping each other with your troubles, you truly obey the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is important when he really is not, he is only fooling himself. Each person should judge his own actions and not compare himself with others. Then he can be proud for what he himself has done. Each person must be responsible for himself.”⁸

This particular translation makes clear that the contrast lies between helping each other with our various troubles and accepting responsibility for oneself. This same passage read from another contemporary translation (the **NEW LIVING TRANSLATION**) emphasises that the difference lies between sharing our problems and assuming responsibility for our own actions. “Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way, obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody.

“Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get satisfaction of a job well done, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct”⁹ [**GALATIANS 6:1-5**].

VERSE TWO leads us to expect that a serving Christian will lend a hand with heavy loads, whereas **VERSE FIVE** teaches that a Christian may test his own actions through pulling his own weight. There is no mystery that some burdens are to be shared—they are so heavy that we need others to help us. Reading the words, “bear one another’s burdens,” we understand that this is speaking of loads too heavy to carry alone. Who among us has never had a load which we would have gladly shared with a fellow believer if only someone had offered to provide relief and refreshment through sharing the burden?

“Each will have to bear his own load” indicates that there are some loads that we alone can carry. We are to aspire to be mature and carry our own weight. We are to assume responsibility for ourselves. This is the essence of Paul’s words. We are to be a people that reach out to one another to lift and to strengthen one another, but at the same time we are each responsible to assume responsibility for our own lives and for our own conduct.

When Paul speaks of the need to carry each other’s burdens, it would be natural to think of him referring to the situation described in **VERSE ONE** of our text. There, you will recall that a fellow Christian has perhaps been overtaken by sin. Now that fellow saint is snared in the devil’s trap. **VERSE TWO** teaches us to exercise forbearance and compassion towards one another, especially in the case of those weaknesses which too often attend the lives of each one of us. Though we dare not treat sin lightly, neither should we be severe against one another because of sin. Instead, the apostolic instruction directs us to sympathise with one another in the various trials and troubles that we may meet with and to be ready to extend to one another the comfort and counsel, the help and assistance, which individual circumstances may require. To encourage us in this ministry the apostle adds that in acting thusly, we shall fulfil the law of Christ.

⁸ NCV, op. cit.

⁹ **Holy Bible: New Living Translation** (Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL 2013)

Our Lord bears with us in our weaknesses and follies—He sympathises with our weaknesses [see **HEBREWS 4:15**]. Because this is true, we should maintain the same attitude toward one another. Though, as Christians, we are freed from the Law of Moses, we are yet under the Law of Christ. A characteristic which marked those who attempted to keep Moses' law was the act of laying unnecessary burdens upon others. As those who have known the reign of Christ, it is much more attractive for us to fulfil the Law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens. Let me emphasise that insisting upon punishment speaks of those who are under Law; insisting upon restoration speaks of those who know the freedom of Christ. I am not pleading for license or antinomy, but I am pleading for wisdom which will result in building up one another in the Faith.

Though the principle would apply to any burden, the context has special reference to the heavy and oppressive weight resulting from succumbing to temptation and concomitant spiritual failure. While the spiritual among us do the work of restoring, all believers are to become involved through prayer and encouragement. This, wrote Paul, will fulfil (*anapleróo*) the law of Christ, that is, the principle of love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" [**GALATIANS 5:14**]. Of course, this command is simply an iteration of **JOHN 13:34**, where Jesus taught His disciples. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

You cannot carry another's burden, much less carry your own load, until the weight of sin has been lifted from your life. Until you have been forgiven sin and born into the Family of God, you are struggling against impossible odds. In that instance, I plead with you to place your trust in Christ Jesus as Lord. Understand that you must be saved from the sin which has contaminated your life and from the consequences of all your sin if you would ever have hope of being a godly person. That transformation begins with surrender to Jesus as Master of life. Listen to the plea of God presented in His Word and do what He calls you to do.

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" [**ROMANS 10:9-13**]. Amen.