

What To Do When Someone You Love Is Trapped In A Sin

Rich Nathan

Sermon—October 23-24, 1999

The Church and Christian Relationships Series

Galatians 6:1-5

The Pope met with his cardinals to discuss a proposal from Ehud Barak, the new leaders of Israel.

"Your Holiness," said one of the Cardinals, "Mr. Barak wants to challenge you to a game of golf to show the friendship and ecumenical spirit shared by the Jewish and Catholic faiths."

The Pope thought it was a good idea, but he had never held a golf club in his hand. "Don't we have a cardinal to represent me?" he asked. "None that plays golf very well," the cardinal replied. "But," he added, "there is a man named Jack Nicklaus, an American golfer who is a devout Catholic. We can offer to make him a Cardinal; then ask him to play Ehud Barak as your personal representative. In addition to showing our spirit of cooperation, we will also win the match."

Everyone agreed it was a good idea. The call was made. Of course, Nicklaus was honored and agreed to play. The day after the match, Nicklaus reported to the Vatican to inform the Pope of the results. "I have some good news and some bad news, Your Holiness," said the golfer.

"Tell me the good news first, Cardinal Nicklaus," said the Pope.

"Well, Your Holiness, I don't like to brag, but even though I have played some pretty terrific rounds of golf in my life, this was the best I have ever played, by far. I must have been inspired from above. My drives were long and true, my irons were accurate and purposeful and my putting was perfect. With all due respect, my play was truly miraculous."

"There's bad news?" the Pope asked.

"Yes," Nicklaus sighed, "I lost to Rabbi Tiger Woods by three strokes."

I have been doing a series on the church and our relationships with each other. One of the things that I have tried to bring out in this series on relationship is how much our American individualism really works counter to the biblical message of church and Christian community.

Now, it is really important that as we seek to apply the message we understand the culture that we are speaking to. One of my great passions in life is to thoroughly understand the culture that I am ministering to. I want to be absolutely in touch with how real people really feel and really function. And that is what Vineyard Columbus is all about. Being aware not only of the truth found in the Bible, but the attitudes and thoughts of people found in our culture.

We are not that in touch with culture until you go somewhere else where people relate very differently. I remember when we went to plant a church in Russia some years ago. One of the things we did was to arrange to have a huge shipment of food shipped over to the city where we were planting the church. The city where we were planting was St. Petersburg, Russia, that was formerly

called Leningrad. So, we had determined that we wanted a certain percentage of food to go to an orphanage where we were ministering and to a school where a number of poor children were obviously inadequately fed. So, we had in our minds the food parceled out mostly to the poor in the city. But at the same time, we knew that in order to get the food into the city, we were going to have to satisfy the city government.

So here we are, this group of Americans, sitting down with the assistant mayor of the city and his little group. We had this major culture clash between American mindsets and Russian mindsets. We walked in and thanked them for the meeting. We were extremely cordial and gracious. We said that we had this amount of food and we would like to give some of it to the orphanage and some of it to the school. Immediately, the assistant mayor slapped the table and said, "20% will go the park service workers; 20% will go to the sanitation workers; and 20% will go to...[basically, his friends]." He left us with basically 20% of the food to do with as we pleased.

Now, not being raised in Russia, being an American, I thought that he was offering a proposal for the sake of negotiations. I said, "That's a wonderful thought and I appreciate that, but let me share with you some of the reasons why we would like to give some of this food to the orphanage."

He, as a Russian, assumed that the problem that I was having was that I had bad hearing. That he hadn't spoken loud enough. So, he began to shout what he wanted. And when I tried to gently protest, he assumed that not only did I have a hearing deficiency, but I must be incredibly stupid. So he banged his fist on the table, because the only way you can get through to someone who is both stupid and can't hear is to shout and bang your fist. We had a bit of a culture clash.

Now there is a major culture clash between the world of the Bible and the world of America when it comes to the issue of community – relationships with each other verses individualism. See, we in America have as a supreme value being left alone, determining our own destiny, calling our own shots without having anyone at any time in any way limiting our freedom to be and to do and to act any way we doggoned well please. And if someone doesn't like what you do and your exercise of your total and absolute freedom, well tough on them – deal with it.

The problem is that when we Americans absolutize freedom and our right to privacy, when we establish each individual as Lord of his or her own universe, we forget that there is a major downside. And the major downside is that we lose the capacity to have loving relationships with each other. A husband and a wife who are both maximizing their freedom, freedom to just be independent, to totally choose their own way without regard to anyone else, will quickly find that they don't have much of a marriage. It is what we share in common with each other. It is our willingness to give up some of our rights, our willingness to listen to each other, to respect each other, to defer to one another, to even receive correction that enables us to build loving relationships and to build community.

See, when we come to this book called the Bible, we must understand that the Bible places a very high value on relationships with each other. The Bible in

no way supports and often contradicts American individualism. The whole Bible, from beginning to end, tells us that we do not do well alone. One of the first things that God said to Adam in the Garden is "It is not good for man to be alone." From the beginning, God determined that we cannot fulfill our ultimate destiny as human beings in isolation. We will never be the people God wants us to be. We will never be as happy as we could be. We will never be as free as we could be. We will never be as whole as we can be by simply asserting our rights to independence.

We must be in relationship with each other to do well in life. And not just the kind of superficial, cordial kind of religious relationships that often take place in the church setting where we cordially say to one another, "God bless you." Christians must become convinced that our very existence, our very capacity to continue as Christians depends on deep, supportive, connected relationships with each other.

As a wedding present to us nearly 25 years ago now, a friend of ours did a calligraphy of a verse from the book of Ecclesiastes which still hangs in our bedroom in our home. It has hung over our bed for 25 years. It says, "Two are better than one. If one falls down, his friend can pick help him up. But woe to him who falls and has no one to help him up."

Have you ever been in a situation where you have fallen and have had no one to look to? Are some of you today so out of touch with others, so isolated, so alone that there is no one around who sees that you are entrapped? If any of you have ever been in a place where you have fallen down and been in desperate need of being pulled out of the muck, and you didn't have someone to pull you up, you know how devastating it is to be so isolated. We often need someone to throw us a lifeline, to confront the lies of hopelessness and defeat, to challenge the bitterness, to lay out some path of restoration. Ecclesiastes says, "Woe to the person who falls and has no one to pick them up."

In the book of Malachi, at the end of the Old Testament, Malachi speaks about a time in the life of the Jewish people when the Jews were in spiritual decline. They had stopped worshipping God in any true way. Their obedience to God was half-hearted. It was a nation who was just going through the motions of religion. Many people in Israel began wondering whether obedience to God mattered at all. In Malachi 3:14 we read that the people asked, "Is it worthwhile to serve God?" Does it pay off to really try to walk out repentance? Does it matter whether I really try to live in the light or if I just skirt into the shadows? What difference does it make if I toy with a little bit of sin.

That is where the people were living and that is where many of you are living today. And then it says, "Those who fear the Lord [I love this verse] talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name."

Some people who still had relationship with God began to talk with other people who had relationship with God. They began to stimulate each other's obedience to God and their reverence for God and worship for God. It said that the Lord saw them encouraging one another and strengthening each other and

helping each other up. God was so pleased watching people assist one another, that he said, "They will be mine in the day when I make up my treasured possession, I will spare them just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him."

God loves it when he watches people assisting each other in living better, in doing what is right, in getting back into the saddle. Here is the question: if we are going to practice Christian community with one another, if we are going to go beyond superficial church religiosity, where we just show up for a big meeting and listen to a teaching and go home to our isolation and our autonomy, if we are to be in relationship with each other, we will often find people along the way who have fallen down. If you begin to engage in relationship here in the church, if you are going to meet people who you will see are drifting from Christ and drifting from the church. You will find someone who has been offended by something that another has said to them, a challenge or confrontation they had with a leader or a pastor. You will meet people who are on their way out.

You might encounter someone who is thinking about heading for the door in their marriage. Basically expressing in some way or another that they have had it. That they can't handle the relationship they have with their husband or wife. They want out.

You might talk with a man or woman who is trapped in a sexual sin. You might talk with a former leader or pastor who has fallen out of the saddle, maybe has been overlooked for a ministry, or has been bypassed. They are lying on the side of the road and are no longer as useful as they once were. It is possible that you will encounter someone with a drug habit or a problem with alcohol or gossip. You might regularly be in touch with the CNN of the body of Christ who is regularly announcing to you the events and the issues that someone else is dealing with in the church. It is possible that the person who has fallen is in your own family. They are a husband or a wife, a child or a parent, a brother or a sister.

Here is the question that we are going to deal with today from the scripture. We want to practice Christian community. What do you do when someone you love is trapped in a sin? Let's pray.

Galatians 6:1-5

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load."

We read in verse 1, "Brothers, if someone who is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." The person who is caught in a sin, the person who is trapped, the person who is the focus of our attention is a Christian brother or sister. Paul is writing to people who are Christians, who have declared their allegiance to live under the rule of Jesus Christ. He is not talking about going out and collecting all of the behaviors and attitudes of the larger Roman world.

Now, this is really important for us as American Christians. Because, frankly, most of the church discussions that I hear if Christian radio, newsletters, magazines are in any way representative of the church in America, most of the discussions I hear concern sin that is happening outside the church. The disgusting way that some Hollywood actor who is old enough to qualify for social security retirement, some old prune-face of a guy, just dumped his wife of 46 years and is marrying this 22-year old personal assistant who is also, by the way, carrying his child. Or we hear about the latest outrage by the Disney company and what they are doing now down in DisneyWorld. Or what is wrong with some TV talk show host.

I am not opposed to, in any way, Christians participating in the democratic process and lobbying, voting, writing letters, doing whatever everyone else in a democratic society does to promote your values. I just want you to see that Paul is not primarily concerned with what is going on out there in the world. Paul's concern and the Bible's concern is to build an alternative community, a haven in the world, an oasis where people can be pulled out of the world and into this place that is very different than the larger society. And so often the message that I hear coming from the American church is that it is almost as if sin is thought of as being out there and not in here. It is almost as if the message is the church is holy, just and good, while those people out there in the world are wicked and corrupt.

I don't preach that way because for me that would be total hypocrisy, completely unauthentic. I know for a fact that people in this crowd, who are members of this church, are struggling with substance abuse, alcohol abuse. I know that some of you men are surfing the net and checking out porn sites. That some of you men and women are involved in unrepentant premarital or extramarital sex. You know what God says and you have chosen to disregard it.

What the apostle Paul is saying is that we can talk to each other here in the church with the kind of frankness and directness that we could never use out there in the world because here we are talking to people who claim that they wish to live under the rule of Jesus Christ. That makes all the difference in the world. If someone you love is trapped in a sin, has fallen down by the wayside, is isolated, discouraged and depressed, the first question I would ask, is that person I love also a person who has committed themselves to live under the rule of Jesus Christ? Because if they aren't, if they do not have Christ living inside of them, then this passage doesn't apply. A person who is trapped and doesn't have Christ, needs Christ. They will never find freedom without the power of Jesus Christ inside. They will never find hope and answers to life. They are always going to be searching for something. That is the problem of AA. People give up drinking and they substitute some other addictive behavior like cigarette smoking or they become dry drunks, as it were. We need something that goes beyond a higher power. We need a person named Jesus.

So the person we are talking to, the person who Paul is saying needs to be corrected or restored is assumed to be a Christian. And what is it that we are to do?

Paul says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”

That word “restore” was used in secular Greek for setting a fractured or dislocated bone. A bone is broken and you would restore it. You would straighten it out. The word “restore” was also used of the apostles when they were mending their nets at the end of a long fishing trip. The fishermen would drag their nets in, overhaul them, clean them, and mend them, fixing what was frayed. This word “restored” was a synonym of a word that the Bible uses often, the word ‘correct.’ It is the Greek word “epanorthosis.” It has the root word “orthos” which means to make straight or right – an orthopedist is a person who makes crooked bones straight. And orthodontist makes crooked teeth straight.

When we are talking about restoration or correction, we are talking about straightening out crooked beliefs or crooked behavior. We are talking about mending what is broken. Repairing what is ruined. We are talking about lifting someone back up who has fallen down, getting them back up in the saddle. We are talking about restoring a person to a place of usefulness, a place of hope. We are talking about helping a person get free from a sin that has them totally trapped. They are tied up like Lazarus when he came out from the grave. Here is Lazarus. He has been dead for four days. Jesus comes along and cries out to the dead man, “Lazarus, get up.” He had to say, “Lazarus, get up” because if he had said just “rise up” all the dead in history would have gotten up as one day will happen. But here is Lazarus walking out of the tomb looking like a mummy from an old black and white movie. He is wrapped up with all these bands of cloth and Jesus turns to some of the his friends and says to them, “Untie him.”

That is the work of restoration. Someone is tangled up. They are alive, but they are so bound and gagged in their sin and their habits and Jesus comes along and says to the restorer, “You untie them. You set them free.”

Now understand that there are lots of other options when you find someone who is erring, who has fallen, someone who has made a mistake. For us there are lots of other options than to go to a person with the goal of restoring them. Think about all the possibilities, all the ways that we try to achieve change in each other’s lives other than to directly go and speak gently to another. To call attention to their behavior and to offer assistance out of the behavior. How do we normally try to produce change in each other’s lives?

Well, we complain. I am always the one who has to clean up after dinner. Why should I drive? Why do I have to mow the lawn? Why do I have to do childcare? What is this business of being recruited? When did I sign up for that?

We can complain. We can make the other person feel guilty. We can try to produce change that way. Don’t you know that you have a mother? When you were seven years old, I stayed up all night when you had a fever. And oh, the labor pains I went through. You were a very, very difficult delivery. 87 hours and all I ask is that you pick up a phone and just call me. Did I tell you that I was sick?

You can make a person feel guilty. I don’t have a car and no one will give me a ride.

We can produce change by sulking – by giving your spouse, your roommate, your boyfriend or girlfriend the cold shoulder.

We can manipulate. I know if I say or do this, then I will get my way. I will make a really nice dinner. I will flatter this person. I will buy flowers for my spouse or my girlfriend. I will pretend that this idea is the boss' idea and then he will go along with it.

We could engage in indirect communication. Drop lots of hints. Joke. Oh, I am just joking. I could really use help with...

Think about all the various ways you employ to try to produce change in another individual instead of going to them directly and gently speaking the truth. You strategize. You fret. You wheedle and whine. You get angry. You gossip.

Now there are positive options. Not every time we see someone making a mistake are we called to challenge that mistake. The Bible speaks about a really neglected attitude in Christian community, it is called forbearance – bearing with each other. It is the ministry of Jesus in each other's lives. Jesus came and he bore our weaknesses. We are told in 1 Cor. 13 that love bears all things. It is the picture of a roof that is bearing up underneath of a load of snow, a load of rain. Sometimes, with someone you love, who has a particular weakness or defect in their temperament, or in their way of relating, you are just called in the strength of Christ to bear up under it.

It may be that you have tried to correct the issue in the past and nothing has happened. It may be that you discerned that God is doing something else in a person's life. It may be that you have little confidence that change will be produced. There are a hundred reasons why you might be called to just bear with it without nagging, complaining or wheedling or whining or manipulating. And Jesus in you can insist you to endure and bear.

Sometimes you might say that for a season before I engage in restoration I am going to pray for this person. God is an awfully good restorer. God can bring about a set of circumstances in a person's life that really does produce change, produce repentance. You might say that before I go I am going to take the next month and really pray for the person to see what God will do without my intervention. But there comes a time when because you love someone, because you hate seeing them trapped or isolated, because you care so much that you cannot allow them to destroy themselves, there comes a time when because you love someone that you can't bear to watch them walk away from Christ or the church in bitterness. Or overthrow their marriage vows after you have born the weight and prayed. There comes a time when Galatians 6.1 really becomes convicting in your life and you must go and restore.

You say, "Again, why should I go to the trouble of talking with someone, trying to correct them and getting involved in their business when they may reject me. I might just be putting my head on the chopping block. Several others have tried and have been completely rejected. Why should I invade someone else's space or go to the trouble of getting together with a fallen brother or sister and try to assist them in getting up?"

Let me share with you why you do this ministry of restoration. You restore what is valuable to you. No one spends hours restoring some particle board

bookcase that you bought at Meijers or on sale at Sam's Club for \$29.95. It is not worth it. Particle board you throw out. But if you have a beautiful cherry bookcase, something that was handmade by your Grandfather that has been passed down through the family, something that your grandparents willed to you that sat in their living room for 50 years, you might take the time to restore the bookcase to its natural beauty. You restore what is valuable.

Today, most of the furniture we buy is designed to throw away in five years. The furniture we buy is generally not designed to be repaired. Some of you know there is a major difference between a high quality sofa that has real wood and wood screws, the springs are tied together, and a sofa that has been put together with staples and plywood. One is designed to last for a lifetime and the other is left out of the curb so some frat guys can pick it up and put it on their front porch. You don't restore throwaway junk. You buy a replacement.

Here's the deal. Why do we restore? Paul is saying that our Christian brothers and sisters are not throw aways. They are not just junk that you replace. Paul is saying that our Christian brothers and sisters are valuable. It is not like the church is so big that when a kinship leader or woman's group leader falls by the wayside that we say, "O well, there are three more where she came from."

It is like this. Imagine you are a parent. Some of you have more than one kid. Let's say you are a parent and have three kids. One of the kids is trapped by a sin. They become overwhelmed by life. Maybe one of your kids goes through a divorce or they have a drug problem or they get pregnant outside of marriage or make someone pregnant. What if your kid really blows it? No loving parent would say, "Well, there are plenty more kids where that one came from. They are replaceable. We can always have another child. Besides, we already have two quality kids at home. And down the street there is really a nice child. We can start relating to them."

We cannot write off our brothers and sisters and say, well, there is just another casualty in the war. They made their bed, now they need to lie in it. We are talking about people Christ died for. We are talking about someone who the Lord spilled blood over. A man or a woman, boy or girl, has real value and ought to have real value to us.

Here is what I want you to do. I want you to bow your heads for a moment and say, "Lord, is there anyone I know who is a professing Christian and who has fallen by the roadside and I am just letting them lie there? Is there anyone I know who has walked away from the church, walked away from Christ. Is there anyone I know who is caught in a sin, who is drifting – someone in my family, in my friendship circle, in my kinship or women's group? Is there anyone living a lifestyle opposed to Christ and I have said, 'Well, that's their life and they need to live it as they please?'"

I want you to write their names down on your outlines. I am going to ask God to raise to the surface the names of hundreds of people across the congregation. Some of them may not even be here in town. They may be friends from the past. They may be a Christian brother or sister in another state, but you have just let them drift away. You restore what is valuable.

Let me sum up where we are right now. Someone has fallen. Someone is trapped by a sin. You go through this evaluation process and say: 1) is the person I am concerned about a brother or a sister? Because if they aren't, there is nothing to restore. There is nothing to bring back to its original wholeness. Such a person needs the gospel. We can only restore a person who has beforehand professed that they want to live under the lordship of Christ and we are restoring reality to that profession.

So #1 is the person a brother or a sister?

#2 – Have they been trapped by a sin? Are they trapped in bitterness or gossip or slander or lying or embezzlement, drunkenness or sexual sin or greed or abuse or substance abuse?

#3 – We would say, "What should I do?" Here we have a few options. We could pray. We always should pray, but we could take a period of time before we go to pray. We could bear with the person, but mostly the Bible calls us to bear with each other's flaws, our weaknesses, not our with people's sins. Sins need to be forsaken. A person trapped in a sin needs to be pulled out from that sin. We need to be assisted.

Well, who should go? Paul says, "You who are spiritual." Now this doesn't let us off the hook – well, I am not that spiritual. He is talking about if you are a genuine Christian. You are one of the spiritual ones. If you are a person in whom the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5, just a few verses earlier, is being born. If you are a person who loves, has peace, is kind, good, faithful. If you are a person who is trying to live by the Spirit. He is not talking about if you are perfect, you go. And you have no right to go if you are not perfect. But if you are attempting to live under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit, you qualify to go.

And certainly, the spiritual would be contrasted with the hypocritical. The parent who has a cigarette dangling out of his mouth says to his son, "Johnny, you shouldn't smoke." There is a little credibility gap. If you are trying to pull someone else out of quicksand, then you had better be sure that you are standing on something solid.

Well, how do we go? The apostle Paul says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Assisting people back to their feet is a ministry of gentleness. Correcting someone, straightening out what is crooked, mending what is torn, challenging what is wrong requires gentleness. I have said this over and over, but Jesus likens correction and restoration to eye surgery. In Matt. 7 Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye while all the time there is a plank in your own eye. You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Anyone who is going to correct another, whether you are talking about your wife, your child, a brother or sister in a small group, a Christian friend at work – anyone who wishes to restore someone to usefulness and freedom must understand what you are doing when you correct and restore is engaging in a

ministry of eye surgery. People are not like asphalt where we can come to them with a jackhammer and beat away. People are not trees that we can come to with an axe and hit them and expect that our little restoration ministry is going to be received. Correction is eye surgery. And you don't bang around in someone's eye and poke them over and over again and expect to receive anything but a sensitive reaction.

What does gentleness look like? Well, there is no formula, except to say gentleness is the way you would want to be treated, if you were overtaken in a sin. It probably looks like someone coming along side and putting their arm around us rather than pointing their finger in our face. It probably looks like a focus upon a particular issue rather than a broad sweeping accusation of our person. It is one thing to say, "you know, I believe that you have a problem with gossip. You regularly are talking about other people in a negative way out side of their presence, and, friend, I say this with all affection, but when you gossip you sin and it hurts me and it hurts Jesus and it is going to hurt this church and our relationships with each other." It is one thing to focus on a particular issue that has a person trapped and it is another thing to say, essentially, you are a defective human being. You are a waste of a person. You never do anything right.

Gentleness confines the restoration to an issue. I am coming to talk to you about your drug use. I want to talk with you about the fact that you aren't serving in this home. I want to talk to you about the fact that you are not giving to the church. Gentleness has to do with our tone. It has to do with our eyes. It has to do with our body language.

Do you understand that only 10-12% has to do with the content of our speech. The rest of it has to do with our body language, our tone, our eyes, our facial expressions. Some people have looks that can kill or tones that communicate anger and upset even when the content of their speech is not angry and upset. Even my dog, who by the way, has been treated very warmly and kindly since experiencing a trauma several weeks ago, understands that tone of voice is everything.

It is the same thing with people. Gentleness involves the way you posture yourself. The way you look and the way you hold your body. It communicates that the way I am talking with you is as a friend and an ally, someone I believe in rather than someone I don't like and who is an enemy.

And when we go we go to carry the burden, not just to point out a fall. If you aren't willing to help a person to walk their stuff out, then don't go. It takes no effort at all to spot each other's faults. Many people think they are discerning because they can see flaws. It is discerning when you can see potential where everyone else sees flaws. It is discerning not just to see the lump of coal, but to see the diamond that the lump of coal could be made into in the hands of the Lord. Anyone could see the apostle Peter's flaws. It took the discernment of Jesus to see in Peter a future leader of the church and a fisher of men.

So Paul presses on and shows us what the character of restoring ministry looks like in verse 2 when he says, "Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ, of course, is the law of love. It

is the commandment to love each other which sums up the rest of the law. A restoring ministry is a ministry of burden bearing where we not only go to point out an area that needs correction, but we say to a person, "I would like to stand shoulder to shoulder with you and walk this out. I want to pray with you weekly." Or "I am going to point you to a counselor or a recovery group or 12-Step group or some place of healing and help. I want to assist you and help you carry the load. I want to stay long enough with you that you are pulled out of your isolation, out of your depression."

Restoration is not a quick hit. It is not a one shot deal.

And in addition to going in gentleness and faithfulness, we need to go in carefulness. Paul says, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one can test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else."

We must rid ourselves of all pride and self superiority when we go to restore. The carefulness is carefulness with ourselves and our own motives and attitudes. It is easy to feel superior to someone when they have fallen by the wayside. The apostle Paul is attempting to get us to rid ourselves of all of that. To not look at someone and say, "thank God that I am not in their situation. Thank God that I was so wise that I didn't get my girlfriend pregnant." Or "I didn't have the affair."

But after all is said and done and we come gently and faithfully and carefully, we also must go to a person firmly. Look at verse 5, "for each one should carry his own load." In other words, yes it is true that we bear one another's loads. We assist each other out of the mud. One falls down and we need another to extend a hand to pick us up.

But there is a pack that we carry that no one else can carry for us – our own individual accountability before God. I think the apostle Paul is giving us some surprisingly modern counsel here regarding our boundaries with each other. See, this text, Gal. 6:1-5, to me has this wonderful balance in it where in order to practice community with each other, Paul calls us to avoid the extreme of independence on the one hand – I have no responsibility to anyone else. No one's business is my business. Everybody should leave me alone. He says we have to avoid the extreme of independence on the one hand, but we also have to avoid the extreme of co-dependence on the other. By co-dependence, modern counselors are talking about people who feel responsible for another person's problem.

Now listen carefully. Because I say this particularly to the gentle, easily dominated wives and husbands who get the tables turned on them. I want to talk with the gentle easily dominated boyfriends and girlfriends and the gentle and easily dominated and manipulated group members and friends and ex-spouses. There are many of you who often get the tables turned on you where another person shifts the burden that they should carry onto you.

Paul says, "Each one should carry his own load." Each person is responsible for his own sin. Each person stands alone before God answerable for their own sin and their own attitudes and their own responses to other people's sins. So often, individuals, especially addicts, will convince the gentle and easily manipulated that the reason why I have this problem is you. The classic line of

the adulterer is “if you were more romantic, if you hadn’t gained so much weight, if you were more affectionate, I wouldn’t have had to get some on the side.”

The classic line of the alcoholic is “I wouldn’t be drinking so much, if you didn’t nag me all the time. It is no wonder a man has to drink with a wife like you and a home in this condition.”

All of us since the time of Adam are incurable blame shifters. It is not my fault, Adam said. It is the woman you gave me, Lord. And we do the same thing. It is not my fault, it is my ex-husband, it is my mother, it was my father. It is your fault, husband. It is your fault, wife. It is the pastor’s fault. It is the woman’s group leader’s fault.

Paul says, no, there is a pack that each one of us has to bear. The pack of our own individual accountability before God for our own attitudes and for our own sin and our own bitterness.

Let me draw out a helpful distinction for you, especially for those of you who are easily made to feel guilty types, those of you who feel regularly that you are probably the real cause for all the problems in the world. You secretly suspect that your children would have no problems at all, if you were a better mother or father. And that your marriage would have no problems if it weren’t for you. And your group would have no problems if you were a smarter, wiser, leader. You easily made to feel guilty types, here is a distinction that we teach in all of our leadership classes here. But even those of you who are leaders probably haven’t gotten this down. You are responsible to other people – to love others, to tell the truth to others, to support others, to pray for others, to attempt to restore others.

But you are not responsible for other people. No one of you is ever responsible for another person’s sins. Nobody has to sin. Nobody has to become bitter. Nobody has to walk away from God. You are not responsible for the response you get or for people’s choices. You are not even responsible for your children’s choices. You are responsible to discipline your children, to model a life of Christ in your home, to correct your children when they are disrespectful in church and in school and to other adults. You are responsible to challenge your children to excellence, to politeness, to cordiality. You are responsible to teach your kids and to comfort them, to embrace them, to pray for them. But you are not responsible for their choices.

So often people remind me of folks who are trying to play both sides of the ping pong game. Not only do I have to hit the ball from my side and love you and challenge you, but I also have to run to the other side and grab the paddle and hit back. Or I have to hold your hand and make sure you hit it back. And we keep pushing a person.

Do not allow another person to shift on to you the pack they must carry. Very often the person who is corrected will attempt to turn the tables on the corrector. Well, you know, you have problems in your own life and I wouldn’t be abusive if it weren’t for you. I wouldn’t be drinking if it weren’t for you. I wouldn’t be looking at pornography if it weren’t for you. And I can’t receive your correction because you didn’t deliver it with the proper manner and the process was wrong. And you weren’t gentle. And I can’t believe the way you approached me and you raised

your voice to me and you weren't pleasant. You were stern and I felt condemned.

Gentle people, own what you need to own, but don't allow the other person who has been overtaken in his sin to turn the tables on you. Yes, I wasn't gentle, but let's get back to the issue. The problem here is not my gentleness. The issue is your drunkenness. The issue is not my nagging, the issue is you have been out of work for 3 months and you still haven't looked for a job. The issue is not the church, the issue is your bitterness.

Here is a little tip on bringing correction. Sometimes you need to sound like a broken record. And this is especially true with teenagers, who will very easily move you around the room and shift the discussion to everything but the issue you are trying to address. You aren't fair. Maybe not, but you still can't go to the party. Every other parent is letting their child go. Maybe so, maybe they are all fools. I don't know, but you aren't going to the party. You hate me and you want me to be miserable. No, I love you and I want you to be happy, but you still can't go to the party. My sister went when she was 16. You cannot go.

Don't allow the person who is being corrected to shift the ground of attack away from that pet sin that they want to defend so much in their life. That pet sin, that behavior, that attitude that they have shielded off from all attack, don't allow them to do that. Keep focused. Stay firm. Be gentle, but be firm.

And you know, we are responsible for receiving correction. Part of the pack that we carry is our accountability before God to receive correction, even when it is not brought with the right degree of gentleness. See, let me finish with a few thoughts here. Most of us are not famous for receiving instruction. Watch guys try to assemble a bicycle or a toy or a piece of furniture. Most folks just look at the instructions only when they get into trouble. There is something inside of every one of us that says, "No. We are going to do this on our own. We know better and we don't need help." We aren't going to depend on others.

In America today, we seriously don't believe that we have anything to learn from each other. We don't think that history has anything to tell us. We don't think that there are lessons from the past. That anyone who lived before the 21st Century has anything to tell us.

I don't have to listen to that preacher. I don't have to listen to the Bible. I don't even have to listen to God. Proverbs 13:1 says, "The mark of the wise son is their ability to listen."

And if you can't listen, Proverbs tells us, you are stupid. If you are a person who can't be corrected ever, if you can't be challenged, Proverbs says you are stupid. Literally, you are brutish, you are like an animal that has to be pulled and beaten. Like a mule who is too stubborn to take correction. There are people who can't be trained. They can't be challenged.

I remember many years ago talking with a man whose wife had just had it. She was fed up with the way he was treating her, with his frequent absences from the home, with his arrogance. I said to this man, "Look, you have a window of about six months here to turn things around. Your marriage at this point can still be saved if you will repent, if you will approach your wife in humility, if you will start speaking to her with respect, if you will stay home every night for dinner, if

you will treat her kindly and gently, you can win her back. But if you continue, I am telling you this, for the next six months, she is going to leave you.

The man was unteachable, uncorrectable, stubborn. Six months later his wife walked out and he came to me and he said, "You need to discipline her. The church needs to exercise church discipline against her."

There are folks who will constantly scorn advice. People come to them in love and say, "don't get married until you work through some of these issues. It is a bad idea now, the church cannot marry you, we can't give you our blessings." What do they know, all these people have conspired together against me. Why should I listen to you? Some people are proud. Maybe they have done well in business and are successful in life. But you know if you aren't a teachable person, if you aren't continually open to learning new things, to being challenged about your current thoughts and behaviors, if you don't continually have an open ear and an open heart, you have stopped growing. You will never be better than you are right now.

The wise person, the person who cares about themselves will go through life with an open ear and an open heart. The wise person will pray to be teachable. The wise person will pray to hear correction, even when it is painful.

If we are going to practice Christian community with each other, we must love each other enough to correct one another when we have fallen or stumbled and we must love each other enough to receive correction with humility and grace.

Let's pray.