

Restoring The Fallen

By Ron Boatwright

There are a number of members of the Lord's church that through spiritual weakness have fallen away and become unfaithful. But in eternity they will be "Having damnation because they have cast off their first faith" (1 Timothy 5:12). And because of this "Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

We should not ever want to see anyone lost in Hell. But Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Here we see that only few will go to Heaven, but the vast majority of people will be eternally lost in Hell. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). Those who depart from the faith were once faithful Christians who had given up.

But what should we do when we see one of our brothers or sisters depart from the faith? "Brethern, 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" (Galatians 6:1). The Lord is depending on us, those of "you who are spiritual", to help restore one back to the Lord.

What causes one to become unfaithful? "Beware, brethern, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today", lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). It is when our faith becomes weak to the point of unbelief that we fall away. If we fall away, wouldn't we want another brother or sister in Christ to help encourage us to become faithful again so we would not be lost in eternal torment? When one falls away, he usually begins to forsake the worship assembly. God's word commands us who are faithful, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:24-27). We are to encourage and exhort one another to be faithful. Unless that brother or sister, who is

forsaking the assembly, repents there no longer remains any sacrifice for forgiveness of his sins. If one dies in that condition, he/she will be eternally lost.

God's word tells us, "And above all things have fervent love for one another" (1 Peter 4:8). If we really love one another, we would not want to see any of our brothers or sisters in Christ lost. "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). The good we have opportunity to do includes helping to restore an unfaithful brother or sister. What greater thing could we do for another? "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). "For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "Who will have all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord doesn't want anyone to be lost, but He is depending on us to help save the unfaithful and lost.

We should be like the apostle Paul who said, "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10). We should encourage others to be faithful to the Lord, "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ....So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10, 12). We too will have to answer for what we did or failed to do.

In trying to restore the unfaithful we should actively "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). In our service to the Lord we should not be like the church at Laodicea to whom the Lord said, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16).

God's word tells us, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). When this happens, that unfaithful brother or sister in Christ can now go to Heaven and not Hell. And Jesus tells us, "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

Let's look around and see who is missing from our number, who have become unfaithful and visit with them to encourage them to be faithful so they can go to Heaven and not Hell. The Lord will be very pleased if we do this.