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“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

Faith Lovingly Confronts

Central Truth: Believers are responsible to correct one another.

L378. Date: August 1994. **Text:** James 5:19-20; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 6:1, 2. **Topic:** Church: Discipline; Exhortation; Faith: Of Believers.

BPWMGIFWMY. Have you seen someone wearing a lapel pin with those letters on it? Those letters mean, “Be Patient With Me; God Isn't Finished With Me Yet.” How true that is of each of us.

We begin the Christian life as newborn infants. We are to grow up in the likeness of Jesus Christ. What a privilege! But to grow we need instruction, correction, encouragement, and discipline. Each Christian needs to be accountable to other Christians. We need to confront with love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are each accountable to God and to one another.

When a person joins a New Testament church, he becomes accountable to that congregation. The church assumes the ministry of watchfulness over the member's spiritual life. The member submits to the discipline of the church. In the bond of love each member confronts other members with words of correction or encouragement.

Here is an appeal to “rescue the perishing” among the saints of God. Some of God's people stumble in the way. The Christian army must not shoot its wounded. It must restore and help them to be strong in the Lord once more. We are responsible.

The Spirit of Confrontation: “Brethren” (James 5:19; Galatians 6:1, 2)

Suppose a Christian brother stumbles and falls into sin. What shall we do about him? He is a brother, even though he has fallen. Jesus said, *“One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren”* (Matthew 23:8). Simon Peter denied his Lord, but he was reclaimed by Jesus himself (John 21). The Corinthian church wandered into serious error, but she was still the church of God at Corinth. This is no appeal to overlook sin. It is rather an appeal to restore rather than reject one who has fallen.

The erring Christian must be restored in spite of his error. Here is the principle to follow: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). His fall is our opportunity for ministry. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one”* (Galatians 6:1). It is not ours to condemn but to reclaim. Let's do it!

Paul admonishes us to approach the erring Christian *“in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1). There must be no harsh criticism. Neither must there be any spirit of spiritual superiority. With grief over the sin and concern for the sinning one, we firmly but lovingly seek to restore. We must *“reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (II Timothy 4:2).

The erring Christian needs to be lifted up, not pushed down. So our goal is to bear his burdens and make restoration as easy as possible for him. Jesus set the example by bearing our sins so we could be established in fellowship with God. It is not too much to expect Christians to do the same for one another (Romans 15:1-3).

The Need for Confrontation: *“If any of you do err from the truth”* (James 5:19)

It is evident that a Christian brother or sister has “erred” from the truth. So the church assumes the responsibility of restoring that person. What type of error calls for that response from the church?

The church should confront when there is a departure from doctrinal truth. We are to hold fast to the faithful word we have been taught, for that is sound, health-giving doctrine (Titus 1:9). If a person does not return to truth after repeated admonitions, he is to be counted as an unbeliever (Titus 3:10). But every reasonable effort must be made to restore that person before he is given over to the devil.

The church should confront when there is a breach of fellowship. It is our privilege to enjoy *“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3), and we should make every effort to preserve it. The person

who breaks the fellowship of the body should be counseled in a loving effort to restore him. But if he refuses and continues to break fellowship, the church should exclude him from her fellowship (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17, 18).

The church should confront when there is a violation of Christian morals. A member of the church in Corinth was guilty of incest. He was excluded from the fellowship of the church until he repented and then was restored (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; II Corinthians 2:6, 7). That is the way the church should see that members “*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [they] are called*” (Ephesians 4:1).

The church should confront when members neglect to assemble with other believers. God commands Christians to meet with their fellow Christians for mutual encouragement through study and worship (Hebrews 10:25). To fail to do so is sin, except for extenuating circumstances. The church is an assembly, and those who do not assemble should be called to give an account.

The Goal of Confrontation: “convert[eth],...save,...hide” (James 5:19, 20)

Most churches are not consistent in the exercise of discipline over their members. Sometimes discipline is carried out in the wrong way. Discipline means “child training.” It is designed to keep the church pure and to keep the member growing in grace as a participating part of the body. The three words, “*convert[eth]*,” “*save*,” and “*hide*,” sum up well the purpose of discipline.

The goal of Christian confrontation is to convert the erring brother or sister from the way of sin. To convert means to turn back. Simon Peter sinned in denying the Lord Jesus. But Jesus knew he could still be a productive disciple. So He said, “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Luke 22:32). Simon Peter was converted and turned back into a profitable ministry by the loving ministry of Jesus himself (John 21:15-17). So may the erring Christian be converted from the error of his way today.

The goal of Christian confrontation is to save the erring member's soul from death. That has no reference to falling away from saving grace and being finally lost in hell. It is physical death which sometimes comes upon a rebellious child of God (I Corinthians 11:30). If a person can be spared from the discipline of physical death and saved for the service of God in this world, it is worth every reasonable effort of the church. The goal is

not to condemn but to reclaim.

The goal of Christian confrontation is to “*hide a multitude of sins.*” What a blessed ministry it is to cover up a host of sins. The revelation of sin in the life of a member brings shame to the church. It reproaches the name of Jesus, the Head of the church. Let a brother or sister be reclaimed from the way of sin. It will stop that person's further progress in sin. The member's cleansing and renewal of a Christian lifestyle will cause former sins to be put in the background and thus hidden from a continual public reminder.

We will never convert, save, or hide the sins of an erring brother or sister by condemning him or her. Gossip about the sinner's failure is contrary to the spirit of Christ and to Bible teaching on Christian confrontation. The goal is always to restore. We are accountable to God for how we respond in helping or hurting one who has fallen. Jesus was so tender that He would not break a bruised reed (Matthew 12:20). We who bear His name and share His Spirit must have the same attitude as He.

The Method of Confrontation (Acts 18:24-28)

God has given us a case study on confronting a brother who was in error. The man corrected was an eloquent preacher. The persons who did the correcting were a faithful Christian husband and wife. The preacher was Apollos, and the couple was Aquila and Priscilla. This incident shows the way to confront a person so as to strengthen him in the work of God.

Respect the erring person. Apollos was very learned in the Old Testament Scriptures. He was eloquent in his speech; he had a zeal for God; and he wanted to bear witness for Christ. None of those things were challenged or belittled by Aquila and Priscilla. They respected him as a gifted Christian brother.

Apollos had one point of weakness. He was still preaching the baptism of John (preparation for the coming Messiah) long after Jesus had completed His earthly ministry and returned to the Father in heaven. John had not commissioned anyone to carry on his ministry. But Apollos' zeal was so great that he picked up John's message and continued to preach it. That was his only point of error, but it was a serious error indeed. **Deal privately with the erring brother about his problem.** Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside privately. They were considerate in not contradicting and correcting him in public. (That might make a person defensive of his error because of his embarrassment.) They explained to him the person and work of Jesus. Apollos saw the biblical basis of their teaching and accepted it. He went from them a much stronger person for the Lord than before. That is

what Christian confrontation is designed to do.

Thank God that Apollos had a teachable spirit. Very likely he knew more about the Bible than did Aquila and Priscilla. He could have hidden in his scholarship or out-argued them with his eloquent speech. But he listened and received the truth of their words. Most erring Christians will do the same if approached in the spirit of Christ.

Encourage the erring person to continue to serve the Lord.

Christian “*brethren*” in Ephesus wrote letters of recommendation to “*brethren*” in Greece, commending Apollos to them. Would they not be afraid he might err again? Evidently not. They knew he could be used of God, and they wanted his ministry extended.

A believer who has been confronted and restored must not be kept out of service. The purpose of confrontation is to get him active for the Lord once more. Give him opportunity to serve, and assist him to serve effectively.

Rejoice in the work of the erring person who has been restored.

Apollos had a dynamic ability in teaching the truth of Jesus. He “*confounded*” (vigorously refuted the arguments of) those who opposed the Christian gospel. He taught in public so that many might hear and be converted. He kept a strong Bible base, his discourse “*shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*” Thank God that this man was restored to Christian service.

Confrontation is not to condemn a fellow believer or to show your superiority. It is to restore an erring believer to an effective life for Jesus. Its spirit is, “I love you too much to see you continue on a course which will hurt you and lessen your effectiveness for the Lord.” Motivated by love and exercised in kindness, confrontation will restore the erring.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is Christian confrontation?
2. Why do Christians need to be confronted?
3. What is the proper spirit for confrontation?
4. What dangers do you face in confronting a brother?
5. What errors merit Christian confrontation?
6. What does it mean to “*convert*” a brother?
7. How does confrontation “save a soul from death”?
8. Why should confrontation be done in private?
9. How can confrontation extend a brother's ministry for Jesus?

10. How is confrontation a sign of Christian love?