

## INTRODUCTION:

This morning, I would like for us to consider a topic that is incredibly applicable to churches all around our nation and the world today.

- I'd like to begin this morning by sharing with you a little story.

An old gentleman states that when he was a small boy, he lived on the coast.

- One morning after a great storm he saw that an old sunk ship had washed up close to shore.
- The storm had blown it in and it was badly damaged.
- He said that often, when the tide would come in strongly, it would almost be washed loose from its position and was close to being washed to deeper water once again.
- He stated that often he would go and stand on the shore and hope that it would be set free.
- He would say, "Go out, old ship; go out with the tide." But it never did.
- Finally, one morning after a severe storm, he went down to look at the old ship, but the storm had beaten it to pieces—only the floating pieces of the old wreck were to be seen.
- It had many opportunities, but it never went out.

In like manner, the opportunities for someone who has fallen away from the Lord's church may be many—however there will come a point that the person's destruction will become unavoidable.

- Obviously this is the last thing that we want for a straying brother or sister!
- And so this morning, I would like for us to focus on what the Bible says about restoring the lost.
- We are going to be looking at a number of different passages from God's word and so I hope that you will grab a copy of God's word and let us begin by turning to **James 5**.

Before we get to that, I just want to express that there are a number of religious people today that will say that Christians are "**once saved, always saved.**"

- I'm not really going to specifically address that issue, however many of these passages will speak for themselves about it.
- I just felt that was worthy of mention before we dig deeply into our study.

In the very last few words of James' letter in **James 5:19-20**, we find the first ingredient involved in the restoration of a brother or sister to Christ.

- James wrote, "***My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.***"
- The King James Version says "***he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way***"

### **I. The first thing we can learn about restoring the lost therefore, is that RESTORATION INVOLVES CONVERSION.**

When I think of the word "**conversion**" I can't help but to think of a conversion van.

- Basically what the conversion companies do is they take a "**plain Jane**" cargo van and they cut windows in the sides, many times raise the roof, and they add all of the interior creature comforts.
- My point is that there is a dramatic transformation that the vehicle goes through.

When we think of a “*conversion*” as it pertains to Christianity it is also true that there is a transformation that takes place.

- Normally when we think of this word, it seems that the first thing we think is that someone who is not a Christian is converted to Christianity.—however that is not the case here.
- It is very clear by **verse 19** that James is specifically addressing “*brethren*” (Christians) who have “*stray[ed] from the truth.*”
- These are people that have been converted to Christianity before, they have lost faith, have quit attending, have gotten pulled into a life of sin, fallen back to the ways of the world, and now they are in need of a dramatic transformation once again.

As James opened this letter to Christians “*dispersed abroad*” he very specifically mentioned that the testing of our faith should produce endurance.

- However for some that is not the case—instead they get discouraged or they get distracted and rather than holding on to the commitment that they have made to Christ, they give in to the lies of Satan and they get to a point that their soul is lost.
- And now in these last two verses of James’ letter, he is closing by saying that the one who helps a fallen Christian see the error of his way will be able to cover a multitude of sins.
- I cannot imagine any other victory in life that is more satisfying than that of seeing a person recommit their life to Christ and thus saving their soul—Restoration involved conversion.

Let’s take a look at **Galatians 6:1** and see what else is involved in a restoration... “*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*”

- The KJV says “*considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*”

## II. **First, we saw that restoration involves conversion, and now we are seeing that RESTORATION INVOLVES CONSIDERATION.**

When attempting to restore a fellow Christian who has gone astray, there are two types of consideration that need to be heeded.

- First of all, we need to consider ourselves—to do a little self examination.
- The word “*consider*” here means “**to look to, to take heed to thyself.**”
- In other words, if I’m approaching a brother in Christ for his lack of attendance, I want to be sure that he can’t turn it around and say, “**I saw you on the golf course two Sundays ago. Who are you to try to correct me?**”

Before approaching someone we need to take a few minutes to consider our own behavior.

- Will this person have cause for turning the tables on me?
- Have I exhibited some behavior that is unbecoming of a Christian?
- The apostle Peter in **1 Peter 2:12** wrote, “*Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*”
- When Peter wrote this, he may have been thinking about what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount in the first part of **Matthew 7** when He talked about removing the “*log*” or “*plank*” from your own eye before trying to remove a very small piece of debris from someone else’s eye.

Once we have done our self-examination, we need to use consideration in our approach.

- In **Galatians 6:1**, Paul wrote that we should “*restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.*”
- It is important to approach someone with great humility and not with a “**holier than thou**” or with a “**self-righteous**” attitude.

- It's easy enough as it is for a person to get a little defensive when they are confronted.
- Let's not give a person reason to feel justified in their actions.
- Restoration involves consideration.

Let's take a look at another passage about restoration—**Matthew 18:15-17**.

**15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

**16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that *BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.***

**17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

### III. As we consider this passage as it pertains to going to a brother about his sins, we find that RESTORATION INVOLVES COMMUNICATION.

It's possible that the very first time we privately show someone a fault that he will listen to you and at that point, as Jesus said, "***you have won your brother.***"

- Your communication the first time you approach someone, however, may not be enough.
- Further communication may be necessary as you are to "***take one or two more with you.***"
- The value that I can see in doing this is that the one in error can see that you're not the only one who is concerned about the sin being committed.
- Jesus pointed out that you also have witnesses who can help in confirming the facts.
- And if this second approach is not effective a third communication may be necessary.
- Jesus said that "***If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.***"
- The person in question at this point has had two opportunities to repent and do the right thing—it's still a private matter.
- However, Jesus (the Son of God), the One who was there with God at the time the world was created is now saying that the matter must be made public.
- If someone does not listen the first two times, we must "***tell it to the church.***"

This is a difficult step to take.

- It's not easy to bring public humiliation to a person who has refused to change, however Jesus is saying that this is a necessary step.
- This is probably the most important step in correcting someone, because frankly, they would rather keep their sin private!
- This is probably one of the strongest motivations that a person will have to coming back and doing the right thing—it takes a little bit of "**backbone**" for us to take these steps to try to help someone.
- However, if someone knows that we'll quietly talk to them a couple of times and then just kind of let it slide behind the scenes and nobody else will ever know about the sin, it is much easier for them to not make the necessary change.

In my own personal opinion making someone's sin public like this is the responsibility of the elders.

- **1 Timothy 3:5** says that it is the elders' responsibility to "***take care of the church of God***" and **Titus 1:9** says that they must be able to exhort a brother.
- Being an elder is not an easy task and I know that making someone's sin a public matter is one of the most difficult things an elder can do, however it must be clear that it is Jesus Himself that says this step in the communication process must take place.
- And if the person still "***refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.***"

What that means to me, is they are no longer to be considered as a part of the body of Christ.

- It seems harsh, but if we truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to follow the plan that Jesus so clearly laid out for us.
- We must do whatever we can to motivate someone to correct their sinful behavior—In the end, anyone who has ever come back to the church will thank us for caring enough to follow these steps.

We must keep in mind that Gentiles and tax collectors were the ones the church was evangelizing on an ongoing basis.

- Even if someone does not respond to the disciplinary actions, we don't forget about them.
- We continue trying to encourage them to repent of past behaviors and to become a part of the church once again.
- Restoration involves communication.

#### IV. **As we consider different passages in the Bible, we also recognize that RESTORATION INVOLVES CONVICTION.**

Those who have gone astray must be convicted of their sins.

- They must be made to realize what they are doing to Christ, to the church, and to themselves.
- And until a person is convicted of their sins, they will not be moved to confess them or correct them.

One of the best examples of this in the scriptures is when Nathan approached his friend David about his sins with Bathsheba.

- We won't be reading through the passage, however in **2 Samuel 12**, Nathan told a parable that convicted David of his sins.
- Nathan found a way to approach a very difficult topic with David and he used a great deal of tact.
- And as you recall, David confessed his sin and he sought forgiveness from God.

The apostle Peter was convicted of his sin by (of all things) the crow of a rooster.

- Jesus told him that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed and Peter didn't believe Him.
- And yet, immediately after the third denial, the rooster announced morning and Peter responded in **Matthew 26:75** by weeping bitterly.
- David and Peter did not respond until they were convicted of their sins.

The apostle Paul was never afraid of confronting sins head on.

- He did so with the church in Corinth and later wrote about their response to that confrontation...  
*“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it--for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while--I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:8-10)*
- This is a powerful example that demonstrates the necessity of convicting a brother or sister of their sins if we have any hope of restoring them to the church.
- And as we saw with Peter's very first sermon in **Acts 2:37**, the people's hearts must be *“pierced”* before a response can occur.
- Restoration involves conviction.

V. As we consider something else involved, let us consider that RESTORATION INVOLVES CONFESSION.

In **James 5:16**, the Bible says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”*

- The word used for “confess” in this passage means to “**assent fully**” or “**agree.**”
- It involves concurring with God—Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon says that it involves “**from the heart, freely**” or “**publicly, openly.**”
- According to James, the half brother of Jesus, this public confession of sins allows spiritual healing.
- It is one of the first steps necessary in coming back and receiving forgiveness for past offenses.

The apostle John in **1 John 1:9** wrote about Jesus saying, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

- In this passage, Thayer says that the word translated as “*confess*” means “**to admit or declare one’s self guilty of what one is accused of.**”
- We have an excellent example in **Psalms 51:1-4**.
- After Nathan told the parable about the lamb and David was convicted of his sin with Bathsheba, David wrote this very powerful confession.. *“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.”*
- Through this confession, David acknowledged his sin, he took ownership of it, he asked forgiveness, and he declared God just in His verdict against him.
- Confession, especially publicly, is a demonstration of one’s humility in admitting an error and a demonstration that the error has been corrected.
- Restoration involves Confession.

VI. There is one final ingredient in the process of restoration and I am certain that it is the one that all of us like the best—that is because RESTORATION INVOLVES CELEBRATION.

If we were to look at the scriptures and search for a “restoration chapter” of the Bible, I would have to say that **Luke 15** would rank right up there with my number one choice.

- In **Luke 15**, Jesus tells about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.
- Jesus expressed that if a shepherd has one hundred sheep and just one of them is missing, he will leave the ninety-nine in the “open pasture” and he will try to find the one which is lost.
- In **Luke 15: 5-7**, Jesus said, *“When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”*

When Jesus told about the lost coin, he expressed that the woman would light a lamp, would sweep the floor, and would search the house very carefully.

- **Luke 15:9-10** says, *“When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

And in the story of the lost son (prodigal son) we find that when the son returned from wasting his inheritance, the father very excitedly welcomed him back with open arms.

- He put a ring on his finger, put a robe on his back, put sandals on his feet, and put a fattened calf to the slaughter as a part of the celebration at the son's return.
- And when the other son was upset that he never received such a celebration the father said, in **Luke 15:32**, "*But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.*"

In all three examples that Jesus gave, we find that the end result was not just a personal celebration, but it was a public rejoicing.

- In all three scenarios the excitement and the joy became very evident to others.
- How excited do we get when someone expresses a desire to correct a problem in their life?
- How much outward joy do we show when a sister re-commits her life to Christ?
- As we've just seen in **Luke 15**, when a sinner repents, it is an important enough event that even the angels of God outwardly show their joy.

### **SUMMARY:**

Let us therefore be concerned enough that we take the necessary actions to bring restoration.

- This is a very real problem amongst Christians today—As a matter of fact, two of my three brothers are in need of restoration.
- My oldest brother left the church after graduating high school and has gotten wrapped up in drugs and alcohol.
- He nearly killed himself in a drinking and driving accident and was laid up in the hospital for some time because he is in need of restoration.

Another one of my brothers was disfellowshipped from the Lord's church even after we attended Harding Christian University together.

- He served the church by getting very involved in an "inner-city ministry" in Minneapolis-St. Paul and he studied to become a preacher at one time in his life.
- However, as time went on, he has turned his back on the Lord's church and is now in need of restoration.

### **CONCLUSION & INVITATION:**

I'm sure in the time that I have been speaking to you this morning, you have thought about a number of people right here in this area that are in need of restoration.

- Let us therefore recognize that restoration involves conversion—a dramatic transformation in the actions and attitude.
- Restoration involves consideration—considering one's own life before approaching someone and then using consideration in how we approach them.
- Restoration involves communication—following the steps that Jesus laid out in **Matthew 18**—Communicating first in private and then with one or two witnesses and finally telling it to the church.
- Restoration involves conviction—A person must be convicted of their sins before they will be willing to make a change.
- Restoration involves confession—Being humble enough to openly admit sins committed and to express a willingness to correct the problem.

- And finally, restoration involves celebration—As in **Luke 15**, let us all rejoice when a brother or sister is restored to the Lord's church and acknowledge that even the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents.

There is no better time than now for a person to commit or re-commit their life to Christ.

- Let us all acknowledge that Jesus Christ died on a cross so that our sins might be washed away.
- May we all be convicted of our sins, willing to confess them before the church and ready to wash them away by being immersed in water.
- If you desire to come or be restored to the Lord's church at this time, won't you come as we stand and as we sing?

**NOTE:** Special thanks goes to Wade Webster of the Southaven, Mississippi church of Christ. The outline for this sermon came from a series of bulletin articles he put together.