

Introduction

I read about a wife who was frustrated with her husband's failure to help around the house. She wanted to tell him but not offend him and so broached the subject subtly. "**Honey,**" she cheerfully asked, "**Wouldn't you like to clean out the garage today?**" Instead of taking the hint though, he responded to the question. He actually examined whether or not he'd like to. Proud of his own self-awareness and transparency, he replied, "**No, I really wouldn't.**" Whereupon his wife walked away twice as conflicted as she had been before. That wife attempted one of the most difficult of all tasks in our human relationships. That task is the ministry of restoration and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to the verse that directly addresses that issue, Galatians 6:1

Trespass

The word "brethren" shows that Paul is discussing our relationships with Christians. But what he says encompasses all our relationships - with family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, and more.

The word "trespass" expresses the subject of his concern. The Greek translated that refers to someone slipping, on an icy road for example. It refers, therefore, to any detrimental act. Someone is doing something that's injurious to others or to him or her. That something is the "trespass" Paul is talking about. A woman asked her pastor what she should do. Her daughter-in-law didn't discipline her children, this woman's grandchildren. She just yelled at them and made idle threats instead. Doing that of course was damaging to the grandchildren and thus the kind of trespass Paul envisions in verse 1.

Restore

Now, let's consider that woman's question to the pastor. What should she do? That's a critical question isn't it? What should we do

when people we care about and love are doing something detrimental?

Paul tells us in verse 2. We should “restore” them. The Greek word translated “restore” refers to repairing something or putting it in its right condition. The idea isn’t punishment but amendment. We’re trying to get people to change, specifically, to stop acting detrimentally and begin acting beneficially. We’re trying to influence them for good.

But how do we do that? Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:15, “**show him his fault.**” That’s the only way that I personally know of to restore. We show the trespasser his or her fault. That requires doing four things. #1 – describe specifically what he or she is doing wrong. #2 – state clearly what the detrimental consequences of that are. #3 – ask specifically for the change in behavior we would like. And #4 – state clearly what the beneficial consequences of that change will be.

Many years ago, a Christian and friend of mine moved in with his girlfriend and they began living together. So I met with him and did those four things. #1 – I told him that he was committing a sin that the Bible calls fornication. #2 – I explained that that sin would seriously damage if not destroy his relationship with Jesus, diminish his character, and be a bad witness to his unsaved girlfriend. #3 – I asked him to move out. And #4 – I explained that doing so would please Jesus, preserve his character, and be a positive witness to his girlfriend.

That illustrates what it means to restore. It means to show trespassers their faults.

Now, doing that is a complicated and exceedingly precarious thing. That’s why Paul does what he does in verse 1. He reveals four essential conditions for restoring. Let’s examine each one of those.

Be Certain

The first is “be certain.” Look at the word “caught.” We talk about getting caught with our hand in the cookie jar. The idea is certainty and that’s what the word “caught” conveys here, certainty.

Stop for a moment and consider how we know someone is

trespassing. It's from observation – ours or someone else's who has told us. They or we observe someone say or do things and interpret what we've observed. But observation and interpretation are sometimes inconclusive. They or we may not have observed enough to draw a firm conclusion. Or what they or we observed may be open to one of several interpretations. The result is that we don't really know for sure if the person is trespassing or not.

So, we don't attempt to restore. We aren't sure that the person is trespassing. There's some doubt in our mind even if it's the slight. So, we don't attempt to restore. Let me quickly add that isn't always the case when it's our minor children. This first condition doesn't always apply or sometimes applies differently to them. That's because parents have a God-given authority over minor children that's unique. But otherwise, the word "caught" seems to convey this guideline. Absent exceptional circumstances, we don't attempt to restore unless we're certain that the person is trespassing. Love requires that we assume the person isn't trespassing until we know for sure he or she is.

Someone told a man that he saw his brother stagger out of a bar, drunk. So the man confronted his brother about it, not only alienating him in the process but learning as well what the truth was. He hadn't come out of the bar but was passing by it while taking a walk. And he wasn't drunk but having an inner ear episode as he was.

Absent exceptional circumstances, we shouldn't attempt to restore unless we're absolutely sure of the trespass. "Be certain."

Be Gentle

There's a second condition for restoring. "Be gentle." Notice the phrase "with a spirit of gentleness." The word "spirit" refers to the attitude and temperament with which we restore. That attitude and temperament should be a gentle one.

That's so often not the case. So much of our restoring is laced with anger. Trespassers, by definition, are doing things that are detrimental.

That tends to make us think one or both of two things: they *aren't worthy* of respecting and protecting and/or they *are worthy* of suffering. It's then a short and easy step from that to actually making them suffer. We know that anger deeply wounds people and so we get angry with them to do just that – wound them. The fact is that anger laces many if not most of our attempts at restoring.

A daughter came home from college one summer with a tattoo on her shoulder. Her father couldn't do anything about that one but did want to preclude her from getting any more. So he attempted to restore her and appropriately so. The problem was that he was mad at her and it showed. He was hostile and combative with her, which only made her hostile and combative with him in return.

Don't restore that way. Do it with a spirit of gentleness instead. The Greek word translated "gentleness" connotes considerate and controlled. The idea is that our concern for the trespasser and others, not our emotions, direct what we say and do. Robert Schuller developed a little formula that I think is appropriate here. It's the three "F's." Our attempt at restoring should be frank, friendly, and fair. We're candid but caring. That's the second condition for restoring. "Be gentle."

Be Humble

The third condition is "be humble." The last line in verse 1 teaches us that, "**looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**" That line is about self-awareness. We know as we restore that we too are capable of the same trespass that we're confronting or even worse.

That self-awareness is essential and here's why. It's because the failures and sins of others tend to make us self-righteous. It's easy to confront a trespasser with the superior sense that "I'd certainly never do such a thing?" But it's dangerous when we do. It makes us think that we're better than he or she is. That in turn leads us to condemn the trespasser instead of the trespass, to attack his or her worth as a person.

But we aren't better. Jesus teaches that in Matthew 7:3, "**Why do**

you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye." The speck is the trespass we're confronting. The log is the anger or self-righteousness with which we often do that. Jesus is saying that our anger or self-righteousness, if we have it, is worse than the trespass we're confronting. His point is a simple one. We aren't qualified to restore until we get rid of that. Angry or self-righteous people have no business restoring.

So, be self-aware. Be constantly conscious that "there but for the grace of God go I" - that we too are capable of the same trespass that we're confronting, or even worse. If we give it enough thought in fact, we'll realize that we've probably done just as bad or worse. That kind of consciousness keeps us from restoring with anger, self-righteousness, or contempt. We're able to identify with the trespasser instead. That in turn compels us affirm not attack his or her worth as a person.

Years ago, I was driving to a man's house to restore him. His trespass was that he had decided to leave his fine Christian wife just because, "**She doesn't make me happy anymore.**" His utter selfishness disgusted me and I regarded him with anger and contempt as a result. That of course was no frame of mind to be in when I confronted him. So the Holy Spirit spoke to me about it and as Paul says it in verse 1, made me look to myself. He showed me that if I wasn't as egocentric as that man was, I was at least close. I had never left my wife but had done countless other self-centered things. Looking to myself humbled me and put me in the right frame of mind to restore him.

That's the third condition for restoring. "Be humble."

Be Spiritual

That brings us to the fourth and most important condition. Look at the words "you who are spiritual." "Be spiritual."

There's something we need to grasp. Not just anyone is qualified to restore. Dallas Willard says it well, "**Only a certain kind of life puts us in a position to 'correct,'**" meaning to restore. He's right and

that certain kind of life is a spiritual life – a kingdom life.

Here's why. Remember the first thing we do in restoring. We describe clearly what the trespasser is doing wrong. We condemn in other words. That's what we're actually doing in restoring. We're condemning. The problem is that people hate to be condemned. Almost everyone takes it as a personal attack. We're condemning them, they think, not their behavior. Which is why it rarely works. Trespassers rarely overflow with gratitude to us for showing them the error of their ways. They rarely respond by changing in the desired way. They almost always angrily turn on us instead and condemn us right back.

So, we need to operate in a divine power not our own in order to restore. Only wisdom and love that are from above, that are supernatural, can overcome people's natural resistance to being restored. Well, the only people who have that are spiritual people. I mean by that, people who devotedly follow Jesus and access His kingdom at hand. They have a power, wisdom, and love that are not their own. They and they alone, therefore, are in a position to restore.

That's why I do what I do. Before I attempt to restore someone, I always pray and ask God two things. First, should I attempt to restore? The answer is usually "no." But when it's "yes," I ask a second thing – for God to guide and empower me as I do. If you and I are spiritual, He'll grant that request. He'll do it – guide and empower us.

Those then are the four conditions for restoring: be certain, be gentle, be humble, and be spiritual.

Conclusion

I'd point out in closing that St. Dominic is our model for this. This pious saint founded the great Dominican Order of Preachers. He lived by the order's strict rules and condemned those who didn't. Paul of Venice shared one of many testimonies about that: **"He reprimanded offenders justly and so affectionately that no one was ever upset by his correction and punishment."** That is the ministry of restoration.