

Northeast Church of Christ

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From the Pen of Paul: *Bringing the Erring Back Home*

MOST EVERYWHERE THE CHURCH EXISTS there are a number of former Christians who have erred from the faith. What do we mean by “the erring?” Paul wrote in I Corinthians 5:11-13, “But now have I written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” Paul also wrote of the erring when he said, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us” (II Thess. 3:6).

Paul also wrote to the Galatians saying, “If a man be overtaken in a fault”; James also spoke of brethren who “err from the truth” (James 5:19). So, when we speak of “the erring” we are speaking of Christians who have returned to a life of sin—started walking in a disorderly manner. It is one who has become “overtaken in a fault” and “erred from the truth.”

One of our greatest challenges is the task of getting the erring to come home. Restoring the erring is a great challenge. Any faithful Christian can work on this task. What is involved in this great task?

Obviously, we must have a proper view of sin. How bad is sin? No one except the perfect Son of God could be a sacrifice to take away sin. This lets us know just how terrible sin is in the

eyes of the Father. There are degrees of sin; some sins are greater than others, (Gen. 39:9; Lam.1:8; John 19:11) but sin, all sin, is terrible enough in the sight of God, as demonstrated by the requirements to “satisfy” God's righteousness. Read and carefully study Isaiah 53 (especially verse 10), and Romans 3:21-26, where Paul shows how a righteous and just God can demand justice for sins committed, and at the same time offer forgiveness for sin. The cross of Christ stands as a strong testimony of the terribleness of sin in the eyes of God.

We must know what the task involves. It is work for all the faithful. “If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth (margin: “brings back”) the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sin” (James 5:19-20). The following traits are also necessary if we are going to bring the erring back home:

1. *Longsuffering, understanding, compassion.* Paul wrote that we are to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:1-2). These traits are necessary for all tasks of the Christian including the task of getting the erring to come home. Compare with God's attitude and work (I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 3:9).

2. *Prayer and God's help.* We should never attempt to accomplish any task without petitioning God for help. “For we are labourers together with God” (I Cor. 3:9). And “in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

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Upward Tendency—Reformation Not A Failure—Missionary Work

The effort we have made, and are now making, at reformation, can never prove a failure upon any ground, unless it be that we have not moral courage enough, as the disciples of Christ—have not sufficient integrity to the great principles of the gospel, to which we have pledged ourselves, to maintain them against the mighty torrent of opposition from the various ranks of bigotry, prejudice, and partyism, together with the combined influence of unbelief and sin. The position we occupy can never fail. While the holy prophets live and speak in their writing; while the preaching of the apostles, their lives, miracles and martyrdoms, live in the memory of men; while Jesus lives, and the throne of the Almighty, upon which he sits, stands unmoved, the position we occupy can not fail. The gospel will live and he who believes it shall never die. The men who believe the gospel, who love it, and hold on to it—keep the faith, press it to their hearts, love and reverence him who gave it, will live co-existent with the years of God. They will never fail; their lives, in this mortal state, will fail; but they, at the same moment, will

triumph. They are not in any doubt and uncertainty, in calling upon their fellow man to return to the faith as it was at the beginning. They have no fears that they are wrong, or that they can possibly be mistaken in making the best effort in their power to determine precisely what the ancient faith was, separating it from everything else, and maintaining it before the world. They know that they are right in this. In one word, they believe the gospel, maintain and defend it, and nothing else. It is the system they believe, maintain and defend and nothing else. They may not understand everything contained in it, as others who have other systems, do not understand everything in their system; but the system itself we know to be right, infallibly right and that we are infallibly right in maintaining it; not because we understand everything contained in it; but because we know the author of it, and know him to be divine—infallible. We know him, love him and regard him; therefore we know that what proceeds from him is infallible, and love it and regard it.

—Benjamin Franklin

*You are invited to the
Friends of Tennessee Bible College Banquet
May 1 at 6:15 p.m.*

This is a fundraising dinner for the Bible College. It helps to pay expenses for the annual lectureship and other things the school does for Christ. Come and enjoy a wonderful fellowship meal with brethren and friends.

*Tickets are \$150.00 each.
For more information, contact the college at 931.526.2616.*

3. *Unity, cooperation.* A united work force always gets the task done more easily and quickly. All should be united in our efforts to restore the erring. As we practice longsuffering and compassion, we should never leave the impression that sin is not “too bad” (Eph. 4:3).

4. *Meekness; humility.* None of us are immune to sin (I John 1:8-10). Therefore, our restoring of the one who errs is to be done “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Meekness is not weakness; it is power under control.

5. *Living right ourselves.* We should not try to correct others if we are more guilty than they. Remember the “mote” and the “beam” in Matthew 7:1-5.

6. *Persistence:* We must not “faint” in our tasks as Christians. Too many give up when they fail on their first attempt (Gal. 6:9).

There is a lot of work to be done if we are going to bring the erring home; but the reward, both to the one brought home, and the one restoring the erring, is great (James 5:19-20).

—Paul M. Wilmoth