

THE SAINTS AND THE SINNER

By Allen Lim

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The “Wowowee!” (noon time television variety show) tragedy at the Ultra early Saturday morning of February 4, 2006, left the nation a grim reminder of the weakness of human nature. With the faint hope of getting a prize which they cannot purchase on their own in a life time, people swarmed to the stadium hoping to be one of the lucky winners. In the stampede which broke out even before they could enter the venue, people behind the line trampled mercilessly on others before them. The ones who fell in the forefront need not have died, if those behind had lifted them up, instead of pushing, in their own rush to get an entrance ticket. We see the same picture in the political arena and unfortunately also in the church, at times.

The Book of Galatians started out as a polemic against trusting in the Mosaic law—specifically circumcision (2:12)—for salvation rather than in Christ alone. Paul emphasized that “it’s for freedom that Christ has set us free.” (5:1) In practice, however, this freedom must not be used to gratify the flesh but to walk in step with the Spirit. Towards the end of this paranaesis (compare 5:15 & 5:26), he specifically reiterated the sins of conceit and envious competition which was present, most likely, in the Galatian churches as stirred up by the false teachers.

Along this light, Paul encouraged the believers to uplift the brethren who have sinned morally or doctrinally, having deviated from the truth. Paul charged those who were considered spiritual to minister to the transgressor. Galatians 6:1 presents the sinner as one who transgressed either unintentionally (the Chinese Union translation) or consciously (English translations such as

NRSV take this in a neutral manner.) Irregardless of how the sin is committed, discipline is required. Just like in a basketball game, a foul is a foul whether technical or otherwise. The only difference is the form of penalty as deemed proper by the referee. But the player is not fouled-out if he corrects himself and keeps from committing the same mistake. When a brother sins, he is not to be forever or totally rejected but disciplined and restored.

This verse (6:1) under consideration is what is termed in grammar as a third class conditional sentence (note the ‘if’ clause). It presents the possibility of someone sinning but has not happened as yet. Therefore the focus here is not so much the sinner but the saints’ response in case someone is found in sin. The church must be prepared to face such a dilemma. What is the responsibility of the saints, the church body, whenever such a situation occurs? The two main imperatives are “restore” and “bear mutually.”

A. The Saints: Wardens of the Sinner.

Restore (6:1): Restoration assumes that a disciplinary action has been imposed. Believers don’t just get away with sin. The Matthew 18 principle should be complied. But the goal of discipline is always restoration. The meaning of the verb “restore” is to set right or make whole. Orthopedically speaking, it is to re-align a broken bone. Many years ago, a reckless cyclist bumped into this author’s mother and broke her wrist. Right away he bound her broken wrist with two pieces of wood before bringing her to the doctor. Here, Paul taught the church not only the first aid, but also the full procedure of spiritual medication. Christ Himself

illustrated this process by restoring Peter graciously and patiently in John 21:15-17. Many times, when a believer falls into sin, people react quickly by condemning or worst, condoning him, while others show pity, but do not know what to do next. Maybe, many more just do not care. In confronting an erring brother, one does not only rebuke but also walks a second mile with him on the road to recovery.

Bear One Another's Burden (6:2): The other action to be exercised is to assist the sinner in overcoming the burden brought by sin. Observe couriers at the pier under a heavy load. They need just as much effort to unload as to lift it up. Usually, another person is standing by to help him lift and unload. This passage pictures a sinner trying to unload his burden of sin, needing badly some kind of assistance. A repentant sinner suffers guilt and shame. Paul commanded the church body to co-bear this burden. He emphasized mutuality by putting the term "of one another" at the beginning of the sentence. When one part of the body hurts, the whole person is affected. In short, the problem of one brother is also the concern of the whole church. A burden shared is a burden divided. Instead of allowing this issue to divide the church, the church should divide the burden among the members.

The reason for this imperative is because by doing so, the church is fulfilling Christ's law of love, which is to love one's neighbor as oneself (5:13, 14). This is nothing new, than what Christ taught in John's gospel that mutual love among the believers is a sign that they are His true disciples (John 13:34, 35). As Christ has borne the world's sin on the cross, believers should emulate their Master's sacrificial love. Out of love, believers bear one another's load rather than breach their fellowship. Out of love, they reach out rather than rub-out. In the writer's own failure along the way, he was blessed with peers who not only wept for him but also wiped his tears.

Indeed, love has overcome such a painful experience.

B. The Saints: Watchmen against Sin.

The bull's eye of the restoration process is the restorer himself. In dealing with the sinner, he must be spiritually equipped and keep watch over himself. In the main clause of the conditional statement (6:1), Paul addressed the restorers as the spiritual ones (*pneumatikoi*), which reminds them that they must be walking in step with the Spirit in the first place as prescribed in 5:16-26. Only one who is guided by the Spirit could restore another who is not. Otherwise, it would just be the blind leading the blind.

Restoration must be carried out in a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness which usually describes the benevolent act of a superior towards his subject, is the proper attitude for helping the erring brother. This does not imply that the former is more superior than the latter, but as the former realizes his own weakness, he will naturally be gentle with the erring brother. The last thing a fallen comrade needs is a heartless rebuke minus words of encouragement. As a father applies the rod on a wayward child, he is also quick to receive him in his arms.

Verses 6:3-5 further explicate the idea of the restorer's personal responsibility embedded in the preceding two verses. The restorer must guard against spiritual haughtiness. Paul extended his teaching further, specifically in the areas of arrogance, actions and accountability.

Take Heed of Arrogance (6:3): This verse is really an extension of the teaching on personal watchfulness in verse 1. The participle, *skopon*, is like a warning sign, "Watch out!" Many times one finds himself failing in the same areas that he has judged others. Spiritual haughtiness is the opposite of awareness of one's vulnerability to fall into temptation. Paraphrasing the present verse, "one should not look at himself over and above who he really is." The danger lies in comparing one-

self with the one caught in sin. It is easy for one to develop an "holier than thou" attitude. Every believer is a possible candidate for any form of sin.

The story is told about a prime minister in the old days of China who carried a wooden case each time he went to the imperial court. His political enemies accused him before the emperor that he was carrying harmful weapons intended for harming the emperor. At the emperor's demand, he had no option but to unfold his secret before all his colleagues. The case revealed a set of worn out clothing which he used to wear when he was just a poor peasant. Each time, he would open the case and looked at this reminder of his humble beginning to abate the pride in his heart. Each believer carries a case with a different content, his former wretchedness in sin until Christ had saved and lifted him up.

Test Every Action (6:4): One way to prevent spiritual pride is to test one's own actions. It is easy to compare with other's weaknesses, and thus puffs up oneself. This also causes one to become complacent in his Christian walk. There is a Chinese saying, "Comparing with those below par shows one more than sufficient, but comparing with those above par leaves one insufficient."

It is also easy for one to judge others by one's own standard rather than gauging against God's ultimate standard in His Word. One pastor used to take attendance in the weekly prayer meeting. Without studying why others cannot join at times, he is quick to judge and see himself as the most faithful. Rather, each one should check whether he has lived up to God's standard or not. This leads to Paul's final exhortation on accountability.

Take Up Accountability: At first glance, verse 5 seems to contradict verse 3 which exhorts the believers to bear each other's burdens. Here it says that each one shall bear his own load. The same verb (*bastazo*) is used in each case, but a different word for

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FACULTY ON THE MOVE

- ☞ Dr. Joseph Shao vigorously promoted the Third Phase Construction Project and conducted BSOP Sundays from January 29 to March 12, 2006. He visited the following churches: United Evangelical Church of General Santos, Cebu Gospel Church, Tacloban Christian Church, Cagayan Gospel Church, and the United Evangelical Church of Zamboanga. On April 19-21, 2006, he will be giving seminars at the Haggai Institute in Singapore. He has also been invited to give lectures in Macao on May 2-4, 2006.
- ☞ The Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Tan Chiu Eng will be involved in the ministry of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), which will be held in April 2006 in Cebu City. She will also attend a Convention of Academic Deans in Singapore during the month of May. In June, she will represent the Seminary at the World Evangelical Alliance Conference which will be held at Capetown, South Africa.
- ☞ The Dean of Practicum Prof. Rosa Shao graduated on March 25, 2006 from the Ateneo de Manila University with a Ph.D. degree on Clinical Psychology.

GRADUATION TESTIMONY

Evelyn Chua



Time flies so fast. I have studied in BSOP for three years now. In these three years, I have found joy that I cannot describe. I used to ask God why He allowed this to happen to me. But I now understand everything that had happened was part of the training to prepare me for future ministry.

When I look back, I have the following conclusions:

1. I have found that I have been closest with God during my three years in BSOP.
2. I was able to finish my theological studies because of God's guidance and power. He gave me wisdom and the abilities to be able to do all of what was required of me.
3. During my practicum, I experienced the Holy Spirit. He certainly guides people to understand His Word and to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.
4. And through the love shown by the faculty and my schoolmates, I have experienced God's true love in my life.

But more importantly, I have learned the assurance of God's calling in my life as a full-time worker. He slowly opened my heart and made me sure of this, at the same time, giving me His promises.

God also allowed me to discover the spiritual gifts He gave me. He also placed in me His burdens for ministry.

Although I understand that I will face difficulties in the days ahead, especially in the ministry; but I know that whatever I will encounter, God will be with me. God promises us in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

All glory to God! Amen.

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load (*baros* vs. *phortion*). The variation is not evident (heavy load against a lighter one). Verse 2 talks about lifting the sinner while this verse is a conclusion of the exhortation against pride. One should take care as he will be accountable for his own actions. Paul often has in view the judgment at the Day of Christ. When the believer faces His Lord before the Bema Seat, one would not report for another person but give account for his own life. With this in view, one would always be careful how to live out the rest of his earthly life.

Another form of accountability takes place in a multi-cultural setting. Many times people would just charge their misgivings to cultural differences. In biblical time, we see cultural tensions between Jews and Gentiles. However, if one is aware of such cultural differences, all the more he should be discreet in his actions. Basic Biblical principles transcend culture and time.

At one time or another, every believer plays either the role of the saint or the sinner.

Irregardless of the role one plays, he needs to confess his own vulnerability. As a sinner, he can expect forgiveness upon repentance. As a saint, he should help restore the sinner in a gentle and humble manner being conscious also of the possibility of yielding to the same temptation. In implementing discipline and restoration, the church would enjoy God's approval and