

Does Your Faith Work?

James 5:19-20

Pastor John Miller

I want to read beginning at James 2:14 to get us started. This verse really is the theme of not only this message but the whole book of James. James says, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says..."—notice it's a profession—"...he has faith but does not have works? Can faith..."—or "that kind of faith"—"...save him?" So the book of James is all about a faith that works. If you say you have faith, then you should have a life that backs up what you say in your profession. Your lips and your life should be consistent with one another.

Someone said, "If you say you believe like you should, why do you behave like you shouldn't?" I like that. So if you say, "I believe," then your life should be followed by believing behavior. We've all met people who say, "I'm a Christian," but if you look at their life, they are anything but a Christian. They have a really perverted or unbiblical view of what a Christian really is.

So I want to ask 10 questions, and I want you to ask them of yourself. I want to ask 10 questions about whether your faith is real, if it's genuine and if it works. This will be a survey of what we've covered over many weeks in our study of the book of James.

Question number one is, "How do I respond to trials?" We saw this in James 1:2-5. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials..." The King James Bible has "temptations," but it should be rendered "trials" or "testings. "...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete..."—or "mature, fully grown"—"...lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

A good test of whether or not your faith is real, genuine and growing or if your faith works is seen in how you respond to trials. We've all met people who said, "Well, I was a Christian, but my parents got cancer," or "my marriage fell apart," or "I lost my job," or "This happened to me, so I no longer believe in God and I'm not following the Lord." They let the trials destroy them rather than strengthen them and drive them closer to God. Trials are food for your faith. If you're a real Christian, you will respond properly and grow in the midst of the trials.

Let me point out the keys to doing this in verses 2-3. First, the keyword is "count." It says, "My brethren, count it all a joy when we fall into various trials." The word "count" is a banking term. It means "to value" or "to put value on something." So if you value character over comfort, you allow your trials to make you better rather than bitter and strengthen you in your walk with the Lord, then you respond by counting it a joy.

Second, you know that trials are working for your good, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." So the keyword in verse 2 is "count," and the keyword in verse 3 is "knowing." So you "count" it, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience," which is steadfast endurance. So trials make you stronger as a believer.

Then the third keyword is “let,” in verse 4. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Then the fourth keyword is “ask,” in verse 5. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach.”

I wanted to point out these keywords—“count...knowing...let...ask” as four ways to properly respond to trials, trouble and adversity, because they enable you to grow as a believer. So you “count” it a joy, “knowing” it’s working for you, not against you. But you have to yield or “let patience have its perfect work.” Then you “ask” God, as you’re going through the trial, for wisdom so you don’t waste the trial, but rather you use it for your good and for His glory.

Now ask yourself this question: “Does my faith work and grow stronger through the trials and tribulations of life?” Someone said, “The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.” In the same trial, one person is hardened and gets bitter and resists God, but the other one gets softer and responds properly to God. Don’t let trials destroy your faith.

So is your faith genuine or real? Is it a working faith? How do I respond to trials and temptation? This is the first part of the Christian life.

The second question we need to ask is, “Do I resist temptation?” The background for it is in James 1:13-18. The two parts of the Christian life are trials and temptations. It cannot be avoided. Someone said, “I can resist anything but temptation.” Temptation will come to the child of God.

We’ll never be free of temptations, so we need to know how to respond to them. First, we need to remember temptation’s source. Verse 14 says, “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” It’s your own lust or desire that draws you away in the temptation. So take responsibility.

Second, remember the course, verse 15. “Then, when desire has conceived...”—so that you disobey—“...it gives birth to sin...”—or “it brings forth sin”—“...when it is full-grown...”—or “when sin is finished or complete” and then—“...brings forth death.” It involves “desire,” then there’s disobedience, which results in “death.” It’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted, but it is a sin when we yield to that temptation.

Then third, remember that temptation can be conquered by two things. In verse 17, remember the goodness of God, and in verse 18, remember that God has given you a new nature. Verse 17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” That is a description of God’s immutability, which means that He doesn’t change. There are no variations in God. There are no shadows of turning in God.

So one of the best ways to keep from yielding to temptation and to sin is to remember that God is good. One of the number one things that the devil does to get you to sin is to whisper in your

ear, "God's not good. God's holding something back. God doesn't really love you. God doesn't provide for you. God doesn't meet your needs. So take it into your own hands." Be very careful; don't yield to that.

When Eve was tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden, the devil said to her, "God knows that if you eat that fruit, you'll be like Him, your eyes will be open and you'll know good from evil. God is holding something back from you. God's not good. God's not giving you everything. He doesn't let you eat of all the fruit." So God wants you to remember his goodness when you're being tempted to sin.

Then remember also that when you were born again and became a Christian, verse 18, you were given a new nature. "Of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." So you were given a new nature. If you're a Christian, you are a Christian because you were born again. The theological term is "regenerated." When you became a Christian—this is so important—you didn't just believe in something; something happened to you. You didn't just believe that Jesus died and rose again for your sins—that is involved—but you also were born again, or regenerated or given new life.

A true Christian has the life of God in their soul. Being a Christian is not just believing something, not just going to church, not just living a life. It's having the life of God in your soul. If you're not born again, you're not really a Christian. You may say you have faith, but if you have not works—because it's produced from your new nature—then you're just saying that, and you don't really possess salvation. So remember God's goodness, verse 17, and remember that you have a new nature.

So here's the point: a faith that works resists temptation. But I don't mean by that you'll never sin. There's only one person who never sinned, and that's Jesus Christ. And thank God His righteousness is imputed to us by faith. But we have forgiveness when we sin. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So we have a new nature, as Christians, but we will stumble, we will fall, we will sin. Yet we have forgiveness in Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:13. says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." So God has provided a way for you to escape temptation and be able to bear up under it.

Now here's question number three that we should give an honest answer to: "Am I a doer of the Word?" Or putting it another way, "Do I only hear the Word, or do I do the Word?" These questions are all tests of your faith—whether or not it is real, genuine and authentic. James 1:19 says, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." But we're slow to hear, we're quick to speak and we're quick to wrath.

Now we do need to hear the Word of the Lord. If you're a Christian, you need to be reading the Bible, you need to be studying the Bible and you need to be in a Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching church. I thank God for a congregation that comes with their Bibles, expecting to hear the Word of the Lord. And by God's grace, this pulpit will continue to preach the Word of God. When you come to Revival Christian Fellowship, the Bible will always be opened, the Bible will always be read, the Bible will always be expounded and applied to our lives. We need to hear the Word, and that's becoming rarer in churches today. They're not really Bible churches. A true church is a church that preaches the Word of God.

So we do need to hear the Word, but it's not enough just to hear it on Sunday mornings; we need to be hearing it on a daily basis. Then we need to receive the Word, verse 21. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness..." The keyword here is "receive," and you do it with humility or "meekness." And what do we receive? "...the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Not only does the Word bring you eternal life, but it saves your life here and now in this life. Read Psalm 1.

What we also need to do in relation to the Bible is we need to obey it. This is really one of the key verses in the book of James. James 1:22 says, "Be doers..."—that's the keyword—"...of the word, and not hearers only..."—if you only hear, then you're—"...deceiving yourselves." So the keywords are "hear, verse 19; "receive," verse 21; and "doers," verse 22. Hear the Word, receive the Word and do the Word. If you do respond those threefold ways, then you are a true believer, because nature determines appetite. If God has given you a new nature, then it's going to want the Word of God.

One of the best indicators that you have been born again is you want to read the Bible, you hunger for God's word. You study the Bible and you read the Bible. That's an indication of salvation or regeneration. If you don't read the Bible, you're starving for the Word of God. Your desire to read the Bible is an indication of salvation or regeneration. Nature determines appetite. Before you were born again, you had no appetite for the Bible. Once you're born again, you say, "Wow! I can't believe I'm reading the Bible! I can't believe I'm loving the Bible! I can't believe I understand the Bible!"

When I got saved at the age of 19, it just blew my mind that I was reading my Bible. "What am I doing?! I'm reading the Bible!" And I'm liking it, I'm enjoying it and I understand it. Then I'm crying and I'm repenting of my sins. It's amazing how God has been working in my life through His Word. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

It is so important that we properly relate to the Bible. So if you are a true Christian, if your faith is genuine, authentic, growing and maturing, you will properly relate to the Bible. You will be hearing it, receiving it and doing it. Psalm 119:2 says, "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!" I like that. If you keep God's Word, you're

blessed and you'll seek Him with your whole heart.

Here's question number four: "Do I show partiality?" For that, we move to James 2. Let me give you four reasons true Christians don't show "partiality" or "respect of persons," it says in the King James Bible. Number one, it's inconsistent with faith in Christ. James 2:1 says, "My brethren..."—that's a repeated refrain in James appealing to the true believer—"...do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality." In other words, don't claim to be a Christian if you show "respect of persons" or "partiality." It's inconsistent with your faith in Christ.

Number two, it's inconsistent with God's own actions. It's ungodly. Verse 5 says, "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?" So God has chosen the poor, but you have showed "partiality" by rejecting the poor. You've judged by outward appearance. That's contrary to God's own actions.

Number three, showing "respect of persons" is breaking God's law and is basically sinning. James 2:8-9 says, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." So "partiality" is contrary to God's Word, and is a sin.

Then number four, it brings God's judgment, verses 12-13. "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

So here's the point. A faith that works doesn't show "partiality," but shows love to all. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." So how is it that God can love the world but we don't? We need to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and not show "partiality." It's a mark of maturity and of a genuine faith.

Question number five is, "Am I able to tame my tongue?" We don't like this one. You ask, "Did you have to do the tongue verses, Pastor John?" James 3:2 says, "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect..."—or "mature"—"...man, able to bridle the whole body." Get your tongue under control, and the rest of the body will follow. And only the Holy Spirit can control the tongue. In James 1:26, we saw that it says, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."

So if your speech is out of control, you need to question whether your faith is real or genuine. The Holy Spirit takes control of our hearts and thus our words. So a faith that works has power over the tongue. Maybe you've sinned by your words this week. Again, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John 1:9. Thank God for that.

Here's question number six. "Do I follow earthly wisdom or heavenly wisdom? Am I living

operating in the sphere of earthly wisdom, which is sensual and devilish, or am I operating under a heavenly wisdom? James 3:13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in meekness of wisdom." So if you're truly wise, it will manifest in the way that you live.

Now James describes earthly wisdom in verses 14-16. "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie not against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above..."—it isn't from God—"...but is earthly, sensual, demonic." So don't function in that kind of wisdom. "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there." That's earthly wisdom.

If you read verses 14-16 and it describes your home, your marriage or your relationships, there's a good chance you need to question your Christianity. And if you're not a true Christian, you need to repent and get right with God. If you're operating in the realm of sensual, devilish, envy, strife, confusion or evil work, that's earthly wisdom.

Now notice the contrast, which is heavenly wisdom, verse 17. "But the wisdom that is from above..."—or "that comes from God"—"...is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." What a contrast to earthly wisdom! So we want to function in the sphere and the realm of wisdom which comes from above.

Then James says in verse 18, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Ask yourself, "Do I have a faith that produces peace?" In your marriage, in your home and in your relationships, is there confusion, envy, strife, or is it "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy"? A faith that works produces peace.

Here's question number seven. "Do I humbly submit to God's will and plans for my life?" I can't tell you how important this point is. This is the mature Christian life. The genuine Christian who's mature and growing actually says, "Have Thine own way, Lord. Mold me, and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still." I'll go where He wants me to go. I'll do what he wants me to do. I'll be what he wants me to be.

James 4:15-16, tells us what we ought to say and how we ought to live our lives. "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was facing the agony of the Cross. And what did He pray? "Not my will, but Yours, be done," Luke 22:42. Satan said, "My will," but Jesus said, "Your will" to His Father. That's the way to spiritual maturity.

James 4:16 says, "But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." A faith that works submits to God's will, purpose and plan for his or her life. I don't think there's anything more important for a Christian to do than say, "God, I'm Yours. I'll go where You want me to go. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll be what You want me to be. I'll say what You want me to say,

because I'm Yours." Are you willing to do that?

"Well, I don't know. God might send me where I don't want to go."

I remember when I was 19. My goal, my ambition, my aspiration in life was just to surf, to be a surf bum. I had no aspirations beyond surfing and surfing and surfing. That's all I wanted to do; be a professional surf bum. But then I got saved, and somebody told me, "You need to consecrate your life to God and tell God to have His way in you." I thought, Well, what if He wants me to move to Barstow?! I said, "I'll go where You want me to go, but not Barstow! I'll go to Tahiti, Fiji, Bora, Bora, Hawaii—anywhere, Lord, but please, not Barstow!" Rather He kept me in San Bernardino my whole life. Then I got a big step up, and we moved to Menifee. But there's no place I'd rather be than smack dab in the center of God's will.

Doing what God's called you to do for His glory, He has a plan and a purpose for your life. Have you prayed? Have you sought Him? In Romans 12:1, Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present..."—there's consecration—"...your bodies..."—your mind, your emotions, your will, your whole life, your whole being—"...a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." Is your all on the altar? Are you ready for God's will? Whether it's sickness or health, poverty or wealth, or whatever it might be? A faith that works submits to God's will, His purpose and His plan for your life. That's a mark of maturity and of the reality of your faith.

Now here's question number eight. "Do I patiently await the Lord's return?" You say, "Well, that's an odd question to ask." But as a believer, we should be motivated by the soon coming-again of Jesus Christ. James 5:7 says, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Be patient like the farmer who is working, verse 7, like the prophet who is witnessing, verse 10, and like the man Job, verse 11, who is patiently waiting. So faith that works is long-suffering, waiting for the Lord's return.

Heaven for the believer is not just a destination; it's a present motivation. Heaven is not just "pie in the sky, in the sweet by and by—can't wait until I get there in the future." But it's a motivation for how we live right now. You hear people say, "They're so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." That's not genuine spirituality. That's a phony spirituality.

If you're authentically, genuinely, heavenly minded, you will be of earthly good. Someone said it like this: "Those who have done the most for this world are the ones that think most of the next world." I believe that with all my heart. Those who help the most in this world are the ones that think most of the next world. It actually motivates them.

What am I living for? What am I doing with my life? Am I just spending it? Am I wasting it or am I investing it? A mark of maturity is that I believe Jesus is coming back, and I want to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," Matthew 25:21. That's all that motivates you. A faith that works longs for Jesus Christ to come again.

Here's question number nine: "Am I prayerful until the Lord returns?" I'm anxiously looking for

the Lord to return, but what am I patiently doing while I wait? I should be praying until the Lord returns.

In Chapter 5, I want you to see these four times when we should be prayerful until the Lord returns. First, is when I'm sad, verse 13. "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray." So when we're suffering, we should turn to God in prayer. Second, we should pray when we're glad, verse 13. "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." Third, we should pray when we're sick, verses 14-15. "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up." And fourth, verse 15, we should pray when we commit sins. "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." So these are the times when a mature Christian will pray: when they're sad, when they're glad, when they're sick, and after they've sinned. Say, "God please forgive me and heal me of my sin."

Now here's the 10th and last question, which is our text. I finally got to our sermon text. It's only two verses, James 5:19-20. Ask yourself this question: "Do I seek to win or reclaim those who have gone astray?" These verses also show us what a mark of Christian maturity is. "Brethren..."—there's that repeated phrase—"...if anyone among you..."—in the Greek it is "any among you, brethren"—"...wanders from the truth..."—the truth of God's Word, and the Christian life—"...and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner..."—speaking of someone who would win the loss back—"...from the err of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." And Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

Now I thought, What was I thinking?! I've come to this text to wrap up my study of James, and it's personally the most difficult to interpret in the entire book of James! What is it talking about? A brethren wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back? Is it saying that a Christian can lose their salvation? They need to be born again, again, and come back to the Lord? I don't believe that's what it's saying.

Let me say a couple of things about this. Number one, all Scripture or a verse of Scripture has only one meaning, and we want to know what it means and what it says. What do I mean by all Scripture has only one meaning? I mean that it's not, "I think it's this," or "I think it's that," or "It can mean whatever you want it to mean." No! A verse in the Bible can't mean whatever you want it to mean. It means what the author originally intended it to mean. This is what's called "authorial intent." The goal of Bible study interpretation is to get to the authorial intent. What did the original author mean by what he said?

I confess to you that I don't know for sure what these verses mean. Part of maturing in your study of the Bible is admitting sometimes that you don't know. But let me tell you what I do know. Number one, I do know, because of the clear teaching of Scripture—but good Christians can disagree with this—that if you have been born again, and thus you're an authentic Christian, you can never lose your salvation. I'm not afraid to say that, because I believe that's what the Bible teaches.

You can lose fellowship with God, but you're not going to lose sonship or your salvation, because you've been born into God's family. This is why earlier I said, when you became a Christian, you don't just believe something; something happened to you. You were actually regenerated. That means you were given the life of God in your soul. You were quickened or made alive spiritually.

I don't see anything in the Scriptures that would indicate that you can "unregenerate" yourself by turning your back on God. You can dishonor God. You can grieve the Holy Spirit, but you can't grieve Him out of you. The Bible says that, as Christians, "You were sealed [with the Spirit] for the day of redemption," Ephesians 4:30. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And Ephesians 1:13 says, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." You were placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. So I believe once in Christ, always in Christ. But this is not a license to sin.

I reject any interpretation that would say this is a Christian who "wanders from the truth," who backslides, but who is converted, gets saved again and you "save a soul from death..."—that's eternal death or hell or damnation—"...and cover a multitude of sins." I don't believe that's what it's saying.

Now there are two possibilities for its meaning, and I don't know which one is true. One possibility is that he's talking about professing Christians. What do I mean by that? In the book of James he taught that those who only say, "I have faith" are not really saved. They profess but they don't possess. So to "err from the truth," as the King James Bible says, is what's called "apostasy." Now a genuine apostate is someone who has never been born again, never really been regenerated, but claims to be a Christian, starts going to church and starts saying, "I believe in Jesus Christ," and yet they're not really born of the Spirit. They're like tares in the midst of the wheat, Matthew 13:24-30. They're not real believers so they fall away. They turn their backs on God. Those are people who were never really saved. It could be that's what James is talking about in verses 19-20; that we need to go to them, try to convert them to true salvation, that the soul will be saved and then that will hide a multitude of sins.

But a better, second, possible meaning is that James is talking about a genuine Christian who errs from the truth and he backslides. And again, I'm not being dogmatic about which of the two is the right interpretation, since they're both Biblical. I believe that a true, saved Christian can backslide. Now for how long and how far? I don't know. But what God says in his Word is that when some people backslide and live in sin, God actually by death will take them home to heaven, so they don't continue in their sin and dishonor God. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, which was a congregation that had a lot of problems and issues, he said, in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, pertaining to the Lord's Supper, "He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." Isn't that interesting?

In James 5:14-15 we just read, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the

church, and let them pray over him....And the prayer of faith will save the sick....And if he has committed sins...”—we have two topics there, sickness and sin—“...he will be forgiven.” Then, in verse 19, he goes right into this command that, “If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back...”

So my guess is—this is where I would lean of the two interpretations—that it is a person who is genuinely a Christian, they have turned away from the Lord and backslidden and we need to go to them and try to bring them back. The word “convert,” in the King James Bible in verse 19, doesn’t necessarily convey the idea of born again. It just means “turns him back.” Remember when Jesus told Peter, “The rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me,” Luke 22:34. And in verse 32, Jesus said, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me...”—or “when you are converted, when you are turned, when you come back”—“...strengthen your brethren.”

So it’s possible for a real Christian to fall back into sin, and out of disciplinary action, God could take their life. Then the death here in the text is actually physical death. 1 John 5:16 talks about the sin unto death. “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.” So sometimes Christians have died because God has taken them home as an act of mercy.

Now this is no license to sin. Your life is not your own. You need to serve the Lord to the fullest, as long as He gives you breath and strength. But we should go to our fallen brothers and sisters and seek to restore them.

Let’s look at a couple of things in verse 19. In James 5:19, he says, “Brethren, if anyone among you...” So this isn’t just the pastor’s job. It’s not my job to follow people around and try to win them back. You as brothers and sisters should be reaching out to them, as well. Notice it says, “anyone among you,” which means whether they are believers or just professors. “If anyone among you wanders from the truth...”—in their belief or in their behavior—“...and someone turns him back...” That’s what we want to do: go to the fallen brother or sister, and try to turn them back.

Then notice the results of the restoration in verse 20. It’s twofold. First, you “save a soul from death.” If they’re true believers, then you save them from physical death. If they’re unbelievers, you save them from eternal death, and, second, you “cover a multitude of sins.” When God forgives our sins, He hides them. He throws them behind his back. He throws them in the sea of forgetfulness, so you “cover a multitude of sins.”

Now, what’s the method of restoration? It’s not in the text, but let me give you three things. Number one, love them who have fallen into sin. Number two, pray for them. Don’t gossip and backbite about them. After Peter sinned, Jesus said to him, “I prayed for you.” Someone said, “They may not let you speak to them about God, but they cannot stop you from talking to God about them.” I like that.

When they say, "I don't want to hear it! I don't want to hear about God! I don't want to hear about Jesus!" just say, "Okay. Well, I'm going to pray for you."

"Don't pray for me!"

"I'm going to pray for you anyway. You can't stop me. You may not let me talk to you about God, but I'm going to talk to God about you." Then sic "the hound of heaven" or the Holy Spirit on them. Pray, "Holy Spirit, sic 'em! Go get them. Make them miserable, so they'll turn to Jesus."

I know before I was saved my parents were praying that God would make me miserable, and he certainly did. They sicced the Holy Spirit on me. He got me and I'm glad.

Then number three, go to them. So love them, pray for them and then go to them. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual..."—or "mature"—"...restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

Chuck Smith tells a story about when he was pastoring, there was a lovely couple in his church, who loved the Lord. She was a beautiful wife, with a husband and children. He got a call from the wife who said her husband had left her for another woman. He packed his bags, moved out and went into this other woman's home. The wife said, "Chuck, would you go talk to him, try to reason with him and reach out to him?" Chuck knew it would be a difficult task, but he went, because he loved this individual and cared about him.

He said he knocked on the door, and when the husband opened the door, Chuck said he looked at the husband and was just so overwhelmed with emotion and love for him that he started to weep. Chuck said, "I just started to cry and started to weep, and started to sob. So I apologized and just turned and walked away. I didn't even talk to him." He said the next morning the man's wife called Chuck and said, "Chuck, he's come home!"

That story really moves me. It's the thought that by just weeping for somebody, going to somebody and showing them you care had an impact. It's like saying, "What are you doing? Why are you living like this? Why have you turned away from the Lord? He loves you. He'll forgive you. Come back." So you who are spiritual seek to restore those who have fallen.

One of the problems we have in the church is that we shoot our wounded. "Oh, you've just been injured. Okay, I'll finish you off." In a foxhole, when a guy next to you gets shot, you don't say, "I'll finish you off." If someone falls away or backslides, you don't say, "I always knew that there was something wrong with them! See how small their Bible was? If they were spiritual, they'd have a big Bible like me. They didn't raise their hands very high either during worship. I knew something was wrong!"

Rather go to them, reach out to them in love and pray for them. Seek to win them back. You'll save a soul from physical death, and you'll cover a multitude of sins. You'll also be like Jesus.

Jesus said, in Matthew 18:12, "If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?" If I were the shepherd, I'd say, "Good riddance" to that stupid sheep. "I've got 99, awesome, elite sheep here. That one was a flaky sheep." But the shepherd goes out and he finds that one sheep. He puts it on his shoulder and he brings it back rejoicing. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep.

"God, help us to be like Jesus, to reach out to those who have fallen."