

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO A FRIEND WHO HAS FALLEN INTO SIN?

By Rev. Will Nelken

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This morning, I am issuing you a special Press Pass that will admit you to an unusual courtroom scene, in which Jesus will be unofficially appointed judge. The case is a moral failure, and based upon eye witness testimony, is a capital offense. The defendant's very life is in Jesus' hands. The prosecution is hungry for a conviction. The defense has no case to plead. The jury returns a "guilty" verdict. The courtroom catches its breath to hear the judge's sentence. You could cut the tension with a knife. Let's read the transcript together.

John 8:2 At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

What role did Jesus actually play? Was He her judge? Her jury? Her prosecutor? Her defender? None of these; He was her Restorer.

Breaking with tradition, Jesus ordered the jury to execute the sentence, with a single restriction. Only a sinless person could cast the first stone (or pull the switch).

Suddenly, *they* were all on trial. Convicted by conscience of their own wrongdoings, the entire jury recused themselves and disbanded.

Her "judge" became her Restorer. In fact, He became the Restorer of every person on the planet, but not by a simple verbal confrontation.

To Restore a Race

God stepped into our world in human form, in the person of Jesus from Nazareth. Although we all stood guilty of abandoning our Maker to pursue "our own thing," as one of us, Jesus took our place, took upon Himself our sins, and bore the stroke of our judgment for sin. He died as He did *in our place*, to accomplish the divine plan of mercy and salvation. As the songwriter said, "He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay." He paid with His life.

And then, the God restored His life to Him. He rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning to live forever, and to give everlasting life to all who put their lives into His hands.

Most people assume Jesus is simply a religious figure, an inspiring historic oddity. Actually, He is God — the God you can know — the God who knows what it is to struggle as a human, the human who knows what it is to overcome every temptation.

Have you put your life into His hands yet? You must do it intentionally. Do it today. He's already done all the heavy lifting. All you need to do to get started is pause and say within your heart, "Jesus, I give my life to you, I yield to your love. Today, I begin to trust you to lead me and make me what you have always wanted me to become."

Every day, in mercy and love, He will guide you with wisdom, and as needed restore you in grace. He can become the best father you've ever known, closer than a brother, and your Forever Best Friend. Jesus creates another chance, a fresh start. He wants to be your Restorer.

Restoration, Our Aim

And that is your God-given role in relationships, too. Here it is, spelled out by Apostle Paul in plain language:

AMP Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual [who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit] should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also.

As a preface to today's talk, let me state that today we are *not* considering those who have sinned against *you*. While these same guidelines apply, the latter case adds additional elements that I will not discuss today. So, for the sake of this application, keep in your mind someone who has sinned in some other way (*not* against you).

"Set right, restore, and reinstate." These are our objectives, church, and it's a tall order. To the contrary, some imagine he said, "Belittle, mock, slander, ostracize," but he did not.

Jesus-Kind-of-Love

When you encounter someone who has fallen into sin, you have one primary responsibility: *to love them as Jesus would*. But you are not Jesus (nor am I), so our first task is to get our feelings under control. Because you cannot love a sinner by your feelings.

(And let me remind you, sinners are people whom you work with, whom you shop with, whom you run with, whom you go to church with, whom you married, and whom you gave birth to — everyone.)

The only way I know to bring strong feelings under control is to submit them to the Holy Spirit, ask Him for help, and then act on your faith, not your feelings.

Always Pray First

The Jesus-kind-of-love is first expressed in prayer. *Prayer before confrontation!*

James 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and **pray for each other** so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

How should you pray for them? How would you want them to pray for you if the roles were reversed?

So, actually, the first subject of prayer becomes you yourself. "Lord, give me the right attitude, the right frame of mind. Subdue my anger and hostility and help me think clearly and circumspectly. Especially, help me to see and share Your point of view. Help me to act as You would. If it is necessary to confront them, show me when and how."

At first, you may be able to do no more than present their name to the Lord. But as you persist, you will be able to ask God to help them as only He can.

When Appropriate, Confront

The next expression of the Jesus-kind-of-love is to tell them the truth. This concept was first recorded in the Bible by Zechariah, an Old Testament prophet of the days of Israel's exile as captives to Babylon, when God spoke these things to him:

Zechariah 8:15 "Now I am determined to bless Jerusalem and the people of Judah. So don't be afraid. ¹⁶ But this is what you must do: **Tell the truth to each other**. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace. ¹⁷ Don't scheme against each other. Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things," says the Lord.

Under the Spirit's Control

Jesus reiterated the concept, but a rule without power-to-perform-it is a rule to be broken. So, God graciously provided His Holy Spirit to enable us to live like this:

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.

"He will guide you" indicates a learning curve, a process over time.

Remember the phrase from our main text, "you... who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit"? He leads and guides us; we must respond and yield to His leadership. This is how we may learn to speak the truth in every situation.

Paul clarified the manner of our truth-speaking (which is as important as the truth we speak):

Ephesians 4:15 We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Again the learning curve: "Growing in every way more and more like Christ."

The truth is so potent that it must be spoken in love. If you cannot speak it in love, say nothing at all, because you would be disrespecting God by doing so and the effect will be null or negative.

Your aim in doing anything at all is to restore the person to fellowship — God’s and, if appropriate, yours. To let them know that God forgives all those who sincerely repent and trust in the saving power of Jesus Christ. Their sin is never so deep that God’s hand of mercy is not deeper still.

I have called this an “attempt,” because you cannot persuade them on your own to let God have His way. It is not within your power to convince them of God’s grace, only to introduce or remind them of it. It is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction and faith.

Patient Trust

Finally, you must encourage them to trust God to work (and *you* must, too!). There may be other issues of which you are unaware, or other processes or consequences through which they must pass before the work is complete. Urge them to be patient with God and with themselves.

Life is a classroom. Learning is lifelong. There are spring, summer, and winter breaks, but only one final graduation. Our aim is to help everyone we know graduate and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”