

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Pastor at First Baptist Church of Bainbridge, NY and serves on the Executive Boards for NYS Ministers Council and the American Baptist Churches NYS Region.

Gentle Restoration

“My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, *you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.*” (Gal. 6:1). In this chapter Paul begins to focus on how the Fruits of the Spirit highlighted in the previous chapter, live themselves out in those *who have received the Spirit*, and amazingly he begins not with love, but with *gentleness*.

Just allow people to see Jesus in you
To see how you pray
To see how you lead a pure life
To see how you deal with your family
To see how much peace there is in your family.
Then you can look straight into their eyes and say,
“This is the way.”
You speak from life, you speak from experience.
(Words to Love By, by Mother Teresa, as quoted in A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People, p. 271)

I have heard people in very harsh ways justify turning people away because they practicing tough love, but here Paul focuses on gentleness - *restoring such a one in a spirit of gentleness*. And then he goes on to say *we must bear one another’s burden* - but also *carry our own load*. Hmmm.... These verses seem contradictory, but I don’t think they are: the call is for empathy, but also accountability.

There is no restoration for someone who is not accountable for their error - their sin if you want to use that term. In order to be accountable there needs to be repentance. Repentance leads to restoration, but repentance can only happen when one is accountable in their error and sincerely wants to change. Bearing one another’s burden is helping that person caught in the grips of sin to discern their error - but to do it with gentleness and humility. To walk with that person and love them through it - to help them to know how much God loves them even in their sin. God loves a sorrowful and repentant sinner. Know how I know? Because God loves ME! He knows my past and he knows my present, the wrongs I’ve committed and the right things I done, but God has never stopped loving me or forgiving me through it all!

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That is the model Jesus provides for us. We bear one another's burdens and we restore and are restored in a spirit of gentleness and love. But we also have to carry our own load and take responsibility for our actions against others.

You see, one is how we love our neighbor and the other is how we love ourselves, both with a spirit of gentleness endowed by our creator and modeled in Christ Jesus.

The key to understanding this I believe is in verses 3 & 4: "If those who are nothing think they are something they deceive themselves." (3) When we exalt ourselves beyond our own status as human beings equal to one another - when we think we are better than someone else because we *do* this or we *don't* do that - then we deceive ourselves. Even Jesus says, "No one is good but God alone." (Mark 10:18). And so, we are all sinners in our own right, and a sin is a sin is a sin.

Paul also says, "All must test their own work." (4) In other words, *take the log out of your own eye and then you can see to take the speck out of your neighbor's...* (Matthew 7:5). All must carry their own loads. Have empathy for your neighbor in his/her error - or sinfulness if you prefer that term - but don't be proud or arrogant or mean spirited, correct and *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness*.

Such is the character and demeanor of one who has received the Holy Spirit. Gentleness, kindness, patience - along with love, joy peace, generosity and self control - are these not the "fruits of the Spirit?" Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16)

And so, when we consider our own faithfulness toward Christ we should continually ask ourselves: By what fruit am I known? Am I carrying another's burden while carrying my own load in a spirit of gentleness?

The goal I think is freedom - to set *one* free and to *be set free* from the burdens of this life. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am *gentle and humble* in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

You who have received the Holy Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

Amen.
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