

CHRISTIANITY (*defined*)
A Study of 1 John
“The Ministry of Restoration”
1 John 5:16-17

Pastor David O. Dykes, Green Acres Church, Tyler, Texas, June 6, 2021

INTRODUCTION: We have funny way of pronouncing things in the South. In fact, I have a list of a few southern towns that most people mispronounce. Let's see how you do. If you've been to Disney World you might have stayed in Kissimmee, FL. It's not kiss -e-me, it's kissSIMee. If you visit this town in Arkansas you better not mispronounce it. It's CRAYpo. Another town in Arkansas is not pronounced Diaz, it's DYE-as. And this town in Kentucky could belong to Pastor Michael's wife because it's pronounced Katie's. I've been to Versailles in France, and it's beautiful. But in Kentucky, they pronounce it – Ver sales.

In East Alabama there's a town where Joe Louis grew up, and it's La -FAY-ette, but in Louisiana it's called La fay ETT. In North Alabama there's a town that's not Arab, it's AYE-rab – their football team is called the Arabian Knights. And in Georgia, it's not like in Egypt, they pronounce this town KAY-ro. The French has influenced a lot of town names- including AYE-bear, Louisiana, and GO-shay, Mississippi. And you can buy Mobile gasoline there, but the town is MObill. Of course, you probably know how to pronounce these Texas towns. There's Green, Texas. For years I mispronounced MeHAYa. But my favorite is Burnette. I stopped there for lunch years ago and called it Burnette. The server said, “It's burn-it. Durn-it. Learn-it.”

I heard about a couple who were traveling through Burnett and they disagreed on how to pronounce it so they stopped at a fast-food joint and went in. The husband said, “How do you pronounce this place? And say it really slow.” The person behind the counter said, “Dai-ry Queeeen.” When I was finishing my Doctor of Ministry degree back in the 80s', I had a field supervisor, Dr. Dotson Nelson, who would listen to my sermons on cassette every week. He would often push the stop button to give me some advice. Once he stopped the tape and told me that the

word “Christianity” had five syllables and I was mispronouncing it. We listened to the tape and sure enough I pronounced it “Chrisjanty.” Ever since that time, I’ve tried to pronounce it correctly. But there is something much more important than pronouncing Christianity correctly – it is practicing it correctly. And that’s why the Apostle John wrote this letter. We’re calling it Christianity defined. We have one more message after today from 1 John and, God willing, Pastor Michael and I will bring one message from 2 John and one message from 3 John.

Last week we read about how we can have confidence when we pray according to God’s will. Then John gives us one good example of when and how we need to pray for another believer. The title of this message is *The Ministry of Restoration*. Let’s read **1 John 5:26-17: If anyone sees a fellow believer committing a sin that doesn’t lead to death, he should ask, and God will give life to him—to those who commit sin that doesn’t lead to death. There is sin that leads to death. I am not saying he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that doesn’t lead to death.**

On the surface, that’s a little difficult to understand, so I want us to read Eugene Petersen’s paraphrase of these verses in *The Message*. They help me understand the point of the passage: **For instance, if we see a Christian believer sinning (clearly I’m not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is “fatal,” leading to eternal death), we ask for God’s help and he gladly gives it, gives life to the sinner whose sin is not fatal. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I’m not urging you to pray about that. Everything we do wrong is sin, but not all sin is fatal.**

The word “sin” appears five times in these two verses. We are responsible for confessing our own sin. But John reminds us that we have a responsibility to help our brothers and sisters when we see them involved in sin. He tells us to pray for them. But the Bible teaches that we should do more than just pray for them. We should be willing to lovingly go to them, confront them, and to restore them to a place of fellowship and service. Let’s learn three important truths about the Ministry of Restoration.

1. Even faithful Believers stumble into sin. John mentions that everything we do wrong is sin. But there is a certain sin that is fatal. In Mark 3 Jesus said that every sin can be forgiven except one. That's called the unforgiveable sin. Through the years, I've had Christians come to me concerned that they had committed the unforgiveable sin. The unforgivable sin is not murder, or adultery, or suicide. It's not taking God's name in vain. Jesus said the unforgiveable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It's basically the sin of saying, "No" to the Holy Spirit's conviction for a person to turn to Jesus and be saved. It's persistent unbelief.

Billy Graham wrote a great book on the Holy Spirit. He wrote that there are three sins we can commit against the Holy Spirit. There is grieving the Spirit, and quenching the Spirit. Neither of those are fatal sins. But here's how he described the only unforgivable sin.

Billy Graham: "The unpardonable sin involves the total and irrevocable rejection of Jesus Christ. It is rejecting, completely and finally, the witness of the Holy Spirit, which declares that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who alone can save us from our sins. No one has committed the unpardonable sin who continues to be under the disturbing, convicting, and drawing power of the Holy Spirit."

(The Holy Spirit, p. 124)

So not all sin is fatal. And even the most faithful believers will sometimes stumble into sin. The roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 could also be called the roll call of failures. Abraham lied twice about Sarah being his sister. Jacob stole his brother's blessing. Moses committed murder. Samson could kill a lion with his bare hands, but he was a he-man with a she problem and he lost his strength in the devil's barbershop. David was guilty of adultery and murder. All of these faithful servants failed. They stumbled into sin, but they didn't stay down. They were restored to usefulness.

On the night before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for Simon Peter. We read in Luke 22:31: **Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your**

brothers.” So Jesus prayed that Peter’s faith wouldn’t fail. Was that prayer answered? Peter denied the Lord three times that night. His courage failed, but his faith didn’t fail. Not all sin is final nor fatal. He was convicted by the Holy Spirit and he went out and wept bitterly. But then he rejoined the disciples and a few days later, Jesus restored him to a place of leadership. So, we need to remember that nobody is perfect except Jesus. We are all people who fail in many ways.

2. Immature Believers delight in the failure of others. There is value in physical exercise but the only exercise some Christians get is jumping to conclusions and running other people down. Let’s imagine that this next week you learn about a member of GABC who is arrested for possession of cocaine. What would be your first response? To pray for that person, or to call your closest friends and say, “Have you heard...?” Not long ago, I watched a documentary about Pat Tillman. He was an NFL star for the Phoenix Cardinals. After the 9/11 attacks he left the NFL to enlist in the Armed Forces as an Army Ranger. He served his country on several tours and duty. In the spring of 2004 he was killed in the mountains of Afghanistan. Although there was an initial cover-up, the Pentagon ruled that his death was due to “friendly fire.” Although that sounds like an oxymoron, it is a tragic reality that sometimes in the heat of battle, allies are sometimes mistaken as the enemy.

Friendly Fire can also happen in the church. My friend Ron Dunn wrote a book entitled, “*Surviving Friendly Fire: How to Respond When You’re Hurt by Someone You Trust.*” He claims that thousands of Christians who used to attend our churches are now AWOL because instead of helping them up when they fell into sin, we tended to kick them when they were down. Someone has said that the Christian army is the only army that shoots its wounded.

In his book, Ron quotes **Henry Fairlie (British Journalist):** “**We wait in ambush for the novel that fails, for the poet who commits suicide, for the financier who is a crook, for the politician who slips, for the priest who is discovered to be an adulterer. We live in ambush for them all so that we may gloat at their misfortunes ... we feel cheated by our media if no one is leveled in the dust by them.**”

Stephen Olford tells the story about a man who didn't like his elderly pastor. When the man heard a vicious rumor about the pastor, and he passed it on to others without confronting the pastor. The pastor denied the accusation, but the man continued to spread the rumor to everyone who would listen. Gradually, the pastor's reputation was destroyed and he was forced to resign from the church. However, it was later proved without a doubt that the accusations were false. The accuser went to the old pastor, who was now retired, to apologize for spreading the lie about him. He asked the pastor for forgiveness. The pastor said, "I forgave you a long time ago, but there is one thing you can do for me." "What is it?" replied the penitent man. The pastor said, "Take this feather pillow to the hill that overlooks our community. Rip open the pillow and let the wind spread the feathers. Then the next day go back and put all the feathers back into the pillow." The man said, "But it would be impossible to retrieve all those feathers." The pastor said, "You're right. And neither can you retrieve hurtful words once they're spoken. I've forgiven you, but your words can never be retracted."

There's a long poem I used to quote about how words can damage and destroy. The last verse says: **"Boys flying their kites haul in their white-winged birds. But you can't do that when you're flying words. Careful with fire is good advice we know. Careful with words is ten times doubly so. Words unspoken may fall back dead, but even God can't kill them once their said."**

The Bible says in Proverbs 26:20, **"Without wood, fire goes out; without a gossip, conflict dies down. As charcoal for embers and wood for fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife."**

Someone who spreads gossip is wrong, but if you listen to gossip, you're just as guilty. You wouldn't tolerate it if someone came and dumped a load of garbage in your living room. In the same way, don't allow someone to dump a load of gossip in your mind.

3. Mature Believers practice the ministry of restoration. Rather than running people down, we should be restoring believers. Restoration is a beautiful process. That Apostle Paul wrote about the value of restoration in Galatians 6:1: **"Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any**

wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted."

B.J. Thomas went home to Heaven this past week. He recorded such hits as "hooked on a feeling" and "raindrops keep falling on my head." He was born again in 1976 and even recorded a great Christian song, "Home where I belong." B.J. Thomas didn't feel that God called him to be a Christian singer who only sang Christian songs. He believed God wanted him to be a singer who was a Christian. In the early 80's he came to do a concert in Birmingham sponsored by a Christian radio station. The venue was packed with Christians. But that night B.J. Thomas starting singing his other hit songs. After a couple of songs, the audience started booing and heckling him to sing Christian songs. Finally after three or four songs, he was booed off the stage. He was still a young Christian, and I read later that he was deeply wounded by the way he was treated by Christians. But fortunately, he was connected to a strong church, and they were there to support him and to encourage him. There are some mean people out there who call themselves Christians, so we need to be in the business of restoration. There are three steps John lays out for restoration.

(1) Loving observation. John wrote, **"If anyone SEES a believer committing a sin."** The key there is you must observe it. That doesn't mean if you've heard it, or if somebody tells you, and if somebody tells you because somebody told them, because somebody has told them. We're not talking about rumors here. I want you to understand that if you do witness another Christian committing sin, you have an obligation, you have a duty to do something about it. Don't just stand by and let it go.

The first murder is recorded in the 4th chapter of Genesis. When God confronted Cain, He asked him, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain had done the worse thing anyone could do to another person – he had murdered his brother. His answer to God showed his sinful, selfish heart. He asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer to that is "yes."

We should be so concerned about the spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters that we should be watching them. We should be encouraging them when they are faithful and we should pray for them when they fail.

(2) Faithful intercession. Next, John writes, that when we see a brother or sister sin, we should ask God to help them. There are many kinds of prayer. Praise is prayer. Thanksgiving is prayer. Confession of your sin is prayer. Asking God to meet your needs is prayer. intercession is where you intercede for someone else. And it's like this. Here's the person. And here is God. And when you're interceding, you come between the two of them and you say, "Father, here's my friend. Here's my brother." And you reach out with one hand to that brother, and one hand to God and you say, "God, I want to pray for that person. I want to stand in this position and lift that person up to you." Intercession is so very important.

Now, as I said, it's observation, not rumors. It also must be intercession, not gossip. And this is one of the warnings I'll always give to those who are involved in an intercessory prayer ministry. Some people hide gossip in a prayer request. They'll say something like, "We need to really pray for Mary and John – they're having marriage problems." Don't use prayer requests as a means of gossip. Ask God to help them – don't spread the word about their troubles.

(3) Gentle restoration. The goal of this process is to restore them to a place of fellowship and service. And God wants to use you as His instrument of restoration. This means that after you've prayed for them and say, "Hey, listen, I love you. And God loves you. And I don't want to see you mess up your life. So I want to help you get back in right relationship with God."

Now, there are a couple of things you need to be careful about. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "If your brother has a speck in his eye, you make sure that you don't have a log in your eye." Amen? Now he didn't say, "Don't go help your brother." He said, "First, remove the log from your eye. Then go help your brother get the speck out of his eye." So what that means is you first need to make sure you're confessed up to date and you're cleansed. Get that log out of your eye, but then go help your brother get that speck out of his.

The second thing to remember is to do this with humility. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1 that we should restore someone gently, considering our own selves so that we won't be tempted. The temptation is to think that you're better than the person who is being restored.

You may be thinking, "If I confront a friend about a sin, won't they resent me?" They might, but the Bible says in Proverbs 9:8 that **"if you rebuke a wise man, he will love you."**

There have been several times in my ministry where someone has come to me and had a genuine concern for me. They have lovingly rebuked me about something. My first reaction is, "Who do you think you are?" But then as I listen and as I consider their motive, I can say, "Thank you so much for bringing that to my attention."

We all have blind spots. When you're driving there's a couple of blind spots where you can't see if cars are there. And we all have blind spots in our personality. It helps when someone comes to you and says, "Listen, there's a blind spot. I want to help you to see it." And if they are really doing it out of genuine concern and they want to build you up, not to tear you down, you ought to receive that rebuke. It will lead to restoration.

Restoration is a beautiful experience. Not long after we moved to Tyler, we met Donna and Wayne Shay. Donna helped us find our first house. Wayne was a homebuilder, but he had a hobby of restoring old cars. I remember visiting his shop and watching him restore a rusted chassis of a 1956 Cadillac. It took him several years, but when he finished, it was a beautiful red Cadillac convertible. It looked like it did in 1956 on the showroom floor. And did you know that a restored car is worth more than the original model? You could have bought a brand-new Cadillac in 1956 for about \$6000 but one that has been restored is worth about \$80,000.

And believers who have been restored become more valuable. Because once you've been restored you see the value in helping other believers who have stumbled.

CONCLUSION: So, where are you today? Do you have a Christian friend who has stumbled? You are their keeper. Pray for them and then go and gently confront them to restore them. Or you may be the person

who has stumbled. You may feel you have been ignored. If you need to BE restored and there's nobody around to do it, there's help. We are your family. Come and talk to me or to one of our staff team members. Speak to one of our Deacons or someone in your connect group. We're all in this together, and we should all be involved in the ministry of restoration.

According to Hebrews 12:1, we all in a race. But we aren't competing against each other. We are to encourage each other to the finish line. A few years ago the U.S. Special Olympics were held in Spokane, Washington. Nine contestants were lined up at the starting line for a race and when the gun sounded, they all started running down the track toward the finish line. But after a few steps into the race one of the young men stumbled and fell onto the asphalt. He cried out in pain. Two of the other runners stopped running and turned around to help him up. A girl with Down's syndrome kissed his knee and said, "There. That will make it better." And then the two runners helped the fallen runner up and all three of them jogged across the finish line with their arms linked together. The crowd stood to their feet and cheered for minutes. They didn't win the race, but they won something more valuable. They learned the lesson that life isn't a competition. We're all running the same race and when one person falls, the rest of us need to be there to help get back up and back in the race.

Can you think of someone who has tripped and fallen? Will you be an expression of God's grace by going to them and helping to restore them?