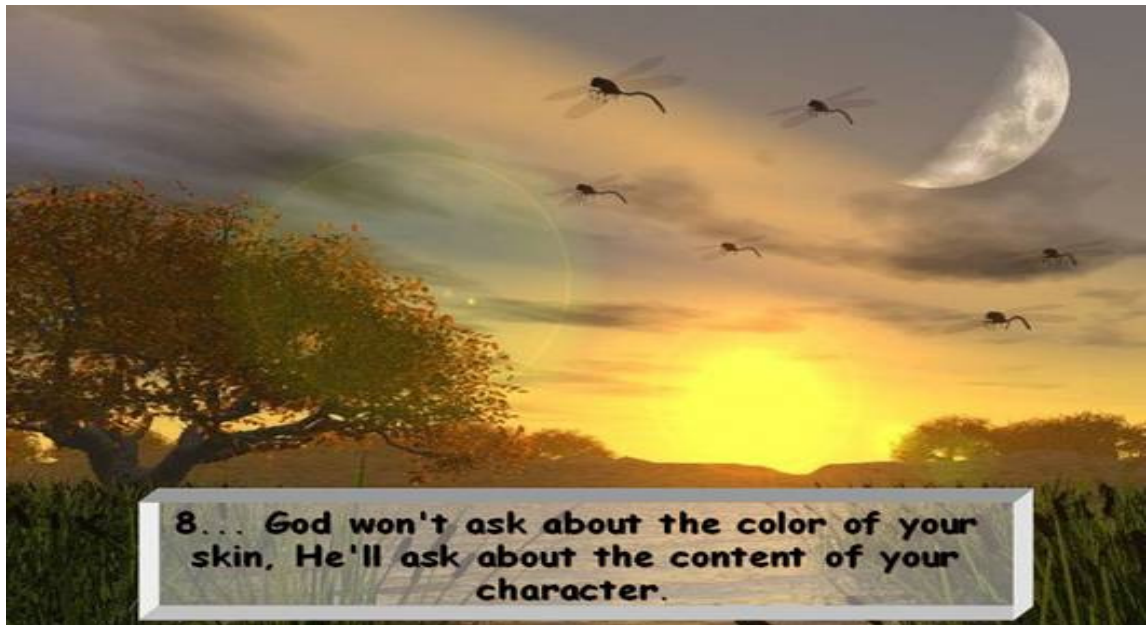


# Treatment of the Erring



**Graham F. Watts, Sr.**

**VISION:** To hear the midnight cry, “The bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him” (Matthew 25:6) and become like Him when I see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

**MISSION:** Purify myself even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3), to be glad, to rejoice, give honor to Christ and be ready for the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7).

**VALUES:** Follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4), be without fault before God (Revelation 14:5), be perfect even as my Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48), wear the Lamb’s fine, clean and white linen (Revelation 19:8) do righteously (1 John 3:10) and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

**OVERALL AIM:** Studies presented here unveil Bible knowledge to inquiring minds to prompt the following inquiries: “Are our feet on the rock of ages? Are we one with Christ as He is one with the Father” (John 10:30 in Evangelism, {Ev} 199.1)? Am I crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20)?

26 **PURPOSE/REASON FOR/WHY**

27  
28 The focus here is on treatment of those who go wrong or astray.

29  
30 **OBJECTIVES/WHAT WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH**

31  
32 At the end of this study, readers are equipped to heal as God does!

33  
34 **SIGNIFICANCE: SO WHAT**

35  
36 It is God's ideal that we sin not, that sin does not have dominion over  
37 us (1 John 2:1; 1 John 3:6 & 9; 1 John 5:18; Romans 6:6, 12, 14-15,  
38 Psalms 4:4 & 119:11; 1 Corinthians 15:34 & Revelation 18:4)! But,  
39 people fail, they slip up; thus, God's foreknowledge of sin led Him to  
40 set up the Office of Advocacy General for mediation (2 Chronicles 6:36-  
41 39 & 7:14; Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 9:13; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:26-28;  
42 10:4, 7-9) on behalf of repentant sinners who forsake unintentional,  
43 unpremeditated sins committed in ignorance of His requirements  
44 (Leviticus 4:2-3, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28; 5:17-18; Hebrews 10:26-29).

45  
46 **BACKGROUND CONTEXT**

47  
48 "To be led into sin unawares--not intending to sin, but to sin through  
49 want of watchfulness and prayer, not discerning the temptation of Satan  
50 and so falling into his snare--is very different from... [planning] and  
51 deliberately... [carrying] out a course of sin" (Our High Calling, {OHC}  
52 177.2). In fact, when the righteous turns to iniquity and commits the  
53 abominations of the wicked, all his/her righteousness shall not be  
54 mentioned and s/he will die in sin if God's messengers fail to give  
55 warning (Ezekiel 18:24, 26 & 3:20). The opportunity to be an agent of  
56 repentance should thrill us with joy, not anger (Jonah 3:1 to 4:1).  
57 This background prepared the way for the study question that follows.

58 **STUDY QUESTION**

59

60 How should we treat those who go wrong or astray?

61

62 **ANSWER SOURCE: HOLY BIBLE**

63

64 1. **We should extend mercy to people who repent and are converted.** When  
 65 the large city of Nineveh heard Jonah's proclamation regarding  
 66 impending doom in 40 days, the ominous message reached their King and  
 67 He led the reform movement by example (Jonah 3:4-6). At the King's  
 68 call for prayer, fasting, sackcloth, putting away of evil and  
 69 violence, all citizens from the least to the greatest obeyed and God  
 70 turned away from His fierce anger toward Nineveh and had compassion  
 71 on the city (Jonah 3:7-10). If God's great concern for sinners leads  
 72 Him to restore them to His good favor upon repentance (Jonah 4:10);  
 73 then that example is instructive for us to follow in being "...Kind one  
 74 to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for  
 75 Christ's sake has forgiven [us]" (Ephesians 4:32).

76

77 2. **We should not hold grudges against severe wrongs when others repent**  
 78 **and are converted.** It helps to remember that joy permeates heaven  
 79 when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10). Jesus told a parable of a father  
 80 who had two sons. The younger son asked for his share of dad's  
 81 wealth, immigrated to another country and there exhausted the assets  
 82 in riotous living. Not long after his bout with folly, he  
 83 experienced starvation and subsequently satisfied his hunger with pig  
 84 food, which by all accounts is not a human delicacy. Sobered by this  
 85 unusual cuisine, the young man arose, returned to his father's  
 86 mansion, repented and sought reinstatement as a servant. The father  
 87 prepared a red carpet party for his repentant son (Luke 15:10-24).  
 88 This example reiterates voluntary forgiveness (read Ephesians 4:32).

89

90 3. **We should exercise humility with those who repent and are converted.**

91 "[God has] ...committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2  
 92 Corinthians 5:19) and in tenderness, we are to deal with those who  
 93 err. "Brethren, if a [person] is overtaken in a fault, [you that]  
 94 are spiritual, restore [that] person in the spirit of meekness,  
 95 considering [yourself], lest [you are] also tempted" (Galatians 6:1).  
 96 "[When] the wicked restores the pledge, give again that he had robbed  
 97 [and] walks in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity..."  
 98 (Ezekiel 33:15), do not hold the wrong committed over the head of the  
 99 repentant as a spotlight. "[Love] ...Keeps no record of being wronged"  
 100 (1 Corinthians 13:5, New Living Translation, NLT), "[Love] ...does not  
 101 take into account a wrong suffered" (1 Corinthians 13:5, New American  
 102 Standard Bible, NASB). As evidenced by Jesus statement to Peter's  
 103 inquiry: "...How [often] shall my brother sin against me and I forgive  
 104 Him..."? Jesus' responded: "...Until [70] times seven" (Matthew 18:21-  
 105 22) indicates that our readiness to forgive should not be worn out as  
 106 our ministry of reconciliation is often called into active service.

107

108

109 4. **We should educate those who repent and are converted.** Forgiving and

110 teaching about how to overcome sin is important because Jesus sets us  
 111 free from darkness by His light, [a.k.a., truth] (John 8:11-12).  
 112 This two step process of forgiving and teaching has merit because  
 113 repeated excursion into sin can intensify the consequences suffered  
 114 (read John 5:14), making recovery from backsliding both distressing  
 115 and depressing (read Hebrews 6:4-6). Therefore, direct the repentant  
 116 person to the Savior, who uses His word (Psalms 119:105) to instruct  
 117 and teach in the way He wants life to be lived (Psalms 32:8),  
 118 ordering the steps (Psalms 119:133 & 37:23) so that sin and iniquity  
 119 does not dominate as in rule the life (Romans 6:12-14), but rather  
 120 that the life abounds in righteousness and truth (read 1 Kings 3:6;  
 121 Psalms 15:1-2 & 96:13; Zechariah 8:8; Ephesians 5:9 & 6:14).

122 5. **We should mobilize into sacred service those who repent and are**  
 123 **converted.** Peter was confident of his love for Jesus and thought  
 124 that he would not only always identify with Jesus but also suffer for  
 125 His sake (read Luke 22:33). But when the mob arrested Jesus, Peter  
 126 followed afar off, i.e., from a distance (Luke 22:47-54). And when  
 127 others identified Peter as one of Jesus' disciples, Peter repeatedly  
 128 denied knowing Jesus (Luke 22:56-60). This should tell us that the  
 129 pronouncements people make with their mouths may, on occasions betray  
 130 the intentions of their unconverted hearts or may have episodes of  
 131 dissonance, where belief and action don't match. But Jesus knew that  
 132 Peter needed conversion of heart before enlistment into service (read  
 133 Luke 22:32). And when at Jesus' trial Peter heard the rooster crow  
 134 and saw Jesus gaze upon him, he remembered Jesus' words--Before the  
 135 cock crow, [you] will deny me [three times]--he left the trial hall  
 136 and wept bitterly (Luke 22:60-62). But after Jesus' resurrection  
 137 (John 21:14), His repeated instruction to Peter regarding feeding the  
 138 flock of God (John 21:15-17), which paralleled Peter's denials of  
 139 Jesus illustrates forgiveness and mobilization into active Christian  
 140 service because unlike Judas who hanged himself for betraying Jesus  
 141 (Matthew 27:4-6), Peter wept bitterly (Luke 22:62), but was not  
 142 overcome with guilt by his actions as was Judas; therefore, Peter  
 143 continued fellowshiping with the disciples (John 21:1-3). An  
 144 important lesson here is we should not make second class citizens of  
 145 those who receive forgiveness.

146  
 147 6. **We should be kind to those who repent and are converted, assuming**  
 148 **that we have the mindfulness to recall God's kindnesses to us**  
 149 **(Hebrews 3:1 & 14; 12:10; 2 Peter 1:4).** A prerequisite to showing  
 150 kindness is recalling that God did not deal with us as our iniquities  
 151 deserved (Job 11:6); therefore, we have a spiritual imperative to be  
 152 more kind and gentle with others who seek forgiveness than those who  
 153 have not tasted of the heavenly gift (Hebrews 6:4). To illustrate

154 this point, Jesus told a story about the awful behavior and  
 155 consequences that followed the unforgiving servant who was also a  
 156 recipient of great forgiveness. The story is a poignant reminder to  
 157 us that we are channels of God's mercy; thus, God expects us to treat  
 158 others with the same compassion that He has shown us (read Matthew  
 159 18:23-35).

160  
 161  
 162 7. **We should exercise imputed love with those who repent and are**  
 163 **converted.** Alexander Pope tells us, "To err is human but to forgive  
 164 is divine." Jesus tells us, "...If we forgive men their trespasses,  
 165 [our] heavenly Father will also forgive us (Matthew 6:14). Sir Issac  
 166 Newton's third law of Physics tells us, "To every action there is an  
 167 equal and opposite reaction." During our lifespan we might need to  
 168 invoke 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just  
 169 and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."  
 170 Do we expect God to forgive and restore us when we repent? Then, as  
 171 partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and the Holy Ghost  
 172 (Hebrews 6:4), let us demonstrate the love of God (Romans 5:5).  
 173 "...Everyone that loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).  
 174 Then think of demonstrating love with those who repent and are  
 175 converted as making deposits in the Bank of Heaven, because banks are  
 176 known to examine prospective burrowers' income to debt ratio in their  
 177 lending decisions. Perhaps, it is for this reason that the Lord's  
 178 Prayer has this clause: "...Forgive us our debts as we forgive our  
 179 debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

180

181

## 182 **ANSWER SOURCE: SACRED WRITINGS:**

183

184 We are pursuing answers to the question: How should we treat those who  
 185 go wrong or astray? More answers follow!

186

187 1. **We should exercise tender compassion with those who repent and are**  
 188 **converted.** "For [our benefit] the Majesty of heaven made Himself of  
 189 no reputation [read Philippians 2:7]; for [us] He came to a world all  
 190 seared and marred with the curse. He toiled day and night to  
 191 instruct, to elevate and to bring everlasting joy to a thankless,  
 192 disobedient people [read Matthew 23:37 or Luke 13:34; John 1:11 &  
 193 7:1, 40-45]. For [all humanity] ...He became poor that ...through His  
 194 poverty [many might] be rich [read 2 Corinthians 8:9]. For [all] He  
 195 denied Himself; for [all] He endured privation, scorn, contempt,  
 196 suffering and death [read Matthew 26:39, Acts 8:32 & Isaiah 53:3-7].  
 197 For [all] He took the form of a servant. This is our pattern (1  
 198 Peter 2:21)! Will we copy it [in being compassionate with] the  
 199 erring, the tempted and the tried" (Welfare Ministry, {WM}, 24.1)?

200

201 2. **We should show heavenly affection to those who repent and are**  
 202 **converted.** This response is appropriate because joy fills heaven  
 203 over every sinner that repents and is converted (Luke 15:7). "[Jesus  
 204 not only presents] the neglect or abuse of the weakest, most erring  
 205 believers, [as committed against] Him, [but also presents] the favors  
 206 shown the repentant [as] ...bestowed upon [Him]. Our [reasonable  
 207 service is clear]. [As participants of the battle between  
 208 righteousness and iniquity, Jesus takes us] forward to [earth's] last  
 209 great day and declares that the treatment given to the very least of  
 210 His brethren is commended or condemned as if done to Him. He [will]  
 211 says, "You did it unto Me" or "You did it not unto Me" (Matthew 25:40  
 212 & 45 in WM 23.1). Moreover, retributive justice for our coldness,  
 213 callousness or abuse of those we should love is certain (read Matthew  
 214 18:6 or Mark 9:42 or Luke 17:2). Let us hold out the olive branch to  
 215 those who return to God in repentance and conversion and welcome them  
 216 back into intimacy and productivity with Jesus Christ (Luke 15:18-20;  
 217 John 4:20-30 & 8:10-11).

218 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: This study examined treatment of the erring.  
 219 The question that focused the study asked: How should we treat those  
 220 who go wrong or astray? In our study, we uncovered nine tools: 1) show  
 221 mercy, 2) show kindness, 3) show heavenly affection, 4) exercise  
 222 humility, 5) exercise compassion 6) exercise imputed love 7) Don't hold  
 223 grudges or resentment, 8) Educate and 9) Mobilize into sacred service.  
 224 Because it is of little redeeming value to engage in Bible study merely  
 225 for information, subsequent paragraphs follow that make a practical  
 226 application of the truths set forth here.

227

## 228 **DISCUSSION: WHAT DO THESE THINGS MEAN?**

229

230 The pleas of some hearts confess: "I have gone astray like a lost  
 231 sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments" (Psalms  
 232 119:176). And God who declared that "[His] people [has] been lost  
 233 sheep; [some of whom has been led astray by] their shepherds [and]  
 234 have... forgotten their resting place" (Jeremiah 50:6), recognizes  
 235 confession when His goodness leads His people to repentance (read  
 236 Romans 2:4) and they return to Him for rest (Matthew 11:28). Thus, God  
 237 sends us to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6) just  
 238 as He sent His Son to... Israel (Matthew 9:12 & 15:24; Mark 2:17). The  
 239 imperative and urgency of forgiving and reinstating those who go astray  
 240 is summarized as follows: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if  
 241 he lose one of them, does not leave the [99]... and go after that which  
 242 is lost until he finds it" (Luke 15:4)? "And when he comes home, he  
 243 calls together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them: 'Rejoice  
 244 with me for I have found my sheep, which was lost'" (Luke 15:6). The  
 245 same message of restoring, reconciling and rejoicing reappears in the  
 246 parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). "The lost piece of silver is  
 247 designed to represent the erring, straying sinner. The carefulness of  
 248 the woman to find the lost silver is to teach the followers of Christ a

249 lesson in regard to their duty to the erring ones who are straying from  
250 the path of right. The woman lighted the candle to increase her light,  
251 then swept the house and sought diligently till she found it  
252 (Testimonies for the Church, Volume 3, {3T} 99.3). Here is clearly  
253 defined the duty of Christians toward those who need help because of  
254 their straying from God. The erring ones are not to be left in  
255 darkness and error, but every available means is to be used to bring  
256 them again to the light. The candle is lighted; and, with earnest  
257 prayer for heavenly light to meet the cases of those enshrouded in  
258 darkness and unbelief, the word of God is searched for clear points of  
259 truth that Christians may be so fortified with arguments from the word  
260 of God, with its reproofs, threats and encouragements that the erring  
261 ones may be reached. Indifference or neglect will meet the frown of  
262 God" (3T 99.4). "Wherefore, let the fear of God be on you..." (2  
263 Chronicles 19:7); "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves that you  
264 love and [obey] the Lord your God" (Joshua 23:11).

265  
266 "We are **NOT** to meet misery and repentance with censure, reproach,  
267 suspicion, distrust and jealousy as the elder brother... of Luke 15.  
268 ...[Rather], welcome the wanderer... [who] returns to [the] Father's house  
269 with the same compassion, sympathy [and rejoicing] as Jesus manifested  
270 toward us when we sought his pardoning love. He met lost humanity with  
271 infinite love. He encircled the perishing, wandering soul in the arms  
272 of his mercy and connected sinful man with his own divine nature, and  
273 adopted the child of humanity into his own royal family. He presents  
274 this example to you, and says, Go... and do likewise. When human agents  
275 become doers of the words and works of Christ, joy is created  
276 throughout the unfallen universe and songs of rejoicing resound through  
277 all the heavenly worlds" (The Review and Herald, {RH}, October 16, 1894  
278 par. 8).

279

280 "The Lord has committed his goods to... his human agents and he expects  
 281 that they will trade upon them. **He has given to the trust of his**  
 282 **people the fatherless and the widow and yet souls have been left to**  
 283 **perish for the want of personal sympathy and labor.** Your neglect of  
 284 one soul is registered in heaven as neglect of Christ. **Jesus has paid**  
 285 **the ransom for every soul and he has identified his interest with that**  
 286 **of the weakest and most erring.** What befalls the children of men  
 287 touches Christ... ..The favors shown to the poor, wretched and sinful  
 288 were also counted as personal favors to [Christ], to be remembered and  
 289 rewarded hereafter. **Christ has not left us in darkness as to what are**  
 290 **our privileges and duty to our fellow-men,** but through various parables  
 291 and illustrations presents our obligation to others. He has unfolded  
 292 before us the scenes of the last great day when all men are to be  
 293 arraigned before his tribunal; and the treatment given to the least of  
 294 his brethren is, according to its nature, commended or condemned by the  
 295 sentence: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these  
 296 my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matthew 25:40). Or, 'Inasmuch  
 297 as ye did it not to one of the least of them, ye did it not to me'"  
 298 (Matthew 25:45 in RH, October 16, 1894 par. 9). What are you going to  
 299 do with this information and the appeal that follows?

300

301

## 302 **CONCLUSIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

303

304 "Every soul who attempts to retrace his[/her] wanderings and return to  
 305 God needs the help of those who have a tender, pitying heart of Christ-  
 306 like love" (RH, October 16, 1894 par. 7). "...How many of the wandering  
 307 and lost sheep have you sought for and brought back to the fold with a  
 308 heart full of pitying tenderness, forgiveness and love [in obedience to  
 309 Matthew 10:6]? How many words of encouragement have you spoken to the  
 310 wandering sheep...? Have you cherished a spirit to upbraid, to reproach

311 and to whip the poor wanderers back to the fold or have you spoken  
312 soothing words of hope, courage, pardon, bearing the wanderer home on  
313 your shoulders, rejoicing at every step and saying: "Rejoice with me;  
314 for I have found my sheep that was lost"? (RH, October 16, 1894 par.  
315 4). Have you felt tender sympathy for the erring one? As you have  
316 seen him/[her] awakening to a sense of the degradation that sin has  
317 brought..., have you spoken words of encouragement and hope? Have you  
318 had a sense of his/[her] suffering from remorse as s/he saw the years  
319 that [was] lost? ...Have your tears fallen with... [the repentant as they]  
320 wept in penitence? Did you... run... to meet... [the repentant] with pity,  
321 gladness and love in your voice and heart, rejoicing that the poor, sin  
322 sick soul was repenting and returning to [our] Father's house..." (RH,  
323 October 16, 1894 par. 5)?

324  
325 "Is it not time to be Christians in practice as well as profession?  
326 What benevolence, what compassion, what tender sympathy, Jesus has  
327 manifested toward suffering humanity! The heart that beats in unison  
328 with his great heart of infinite love will give sympathy to every needy  
329 soul and will make it manifest that he has the mind of Christ. 'A  
330 bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not  
331 quench" (read Isaiah 42:3 or Matthew 12:20). **Every suffering soul has**  
332 **a claim upon the sympathy of others, and those who are imbued with the**  
333 **love of Christ, filled with his pity, tenderness and compassion will**  
334 **respond to every appeal to their sympathy.** They will not say when an  
335 appeal is made to them in behalf of those who are perishing out of  
336 Christ, 'This does not concern me;' ['...Am I my brother's keeper'  
337 (Genesis 4:9)]?" (RH, October 16, 1894 par. 7).

338

339 **CALL TO ACTION: WHAT SHALL WE DO?**

340

341 **"...See that no wandering one is left in the desert to perish for the**  
342 **want of personal labor and sympathy"** (RH, October 16, 1894 par. 13).  
343 "Show a tender, pitiful spirit toward the erring. Come close to  
344 hearts" (2MCP 500.2). Reject the spirits of the older brother: i.e.,  
345 self-righteousness, narcissism, anger, resentment and indifference  
346 toward celebration of a return to spiritual life in the soul of the  
347 repentant and recognize that all which our heavenly Father possess  
348 belongs to us (Luke 15:28-31). Don't grab at straws like the older  
349 brother did; rather take the pearl of great price! You have Jesus  
350 abiding in your heart; therefore, you lack nothing and has everything  
351 at your disposal to share (Psalms 50:10 & 84:11 & 1 John 5:11-12).  
352 "...[Then] go out to seek and to save that which was lost, obeying the  
353 Savior's words when he said, 'Love one another as I have loved you'  
354 (John 15:12 in RH, October 16, 1894 par. 7) and "When He... comes to be  
355 glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe in  
356 that day, ...that our God would count you worthy of this calling and  
357 fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith  
358 with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in  
359 you and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord  
360 Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:10-12).