

Good morning! I had lunch a few days ago with one of my closest friends. During lunch, our conversation ranged widely and among the topics we discussed briefly was the situation of a man who was once a well-known leader in a large church in Florida. He has been removed from leadership after he confessed to having had several extra-marital affairs. I always find these reports heartbreaking. It isn't just that the Church gets bad press; I feel for everyone involved: the spouse, the congregation, children, co-workers. These things are always a disaster for everyone...and they seem to happen all the time. As GK Chesterton famously said, "Sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved." We live in a fallen world and we are all fallen creatures. As I thought about our conversation I was reminded of a familiar passage. Let's read it together:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

### **1 Cor. 13:4-8a**

During our conversation, we talked about what might be needed or appropriate in handling this incident and we talked about how (meaning *in what ways*) restoration could be possible. In fact, I believe this man was going through a restorative process when he confessed to this bombshell--- another extra-marital affair. I told my friend that while there were many reasonable steps that needed to be taken to protect everyone around this man, it seemed to me that what he really seemed to need ---if he was open to it---was pastoral care. Today's passage is often read at weddings, but that's not really Paul's context. This passage is not about love in a marriage, although it applies well; it's about loving the people around us. Jesus gives us a process (in Matthew 18) for dealing with the believer who has transgressed and (in verse 15) He reveals the goal, saying this: "*If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.*" The goal is to bring our transgressing brother or sister in Christ back into fellowship. Remember, Paul says, "*If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.*" I began to think: what if *I* was the one who had this moral failure? Paul tells us in today's passage that real love "*does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*" Does my love fail? Would others' love for me fail if I were to have this kind of moral disaster? Would those around me "*believe all things, hope all things and endure all things?*" I wonder. If your pastor were to fall, would you look for ways to bring him back into fellowship and faith?