

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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Integrity

The Gift of Love (I Cor. 13)

If I preach clearly and powerfully, but do not have love, I am just whistling in the dark.

And if I can see future trends, and understand difficult passages and am on the right side of all church controversies, and if I have a positive mental attitude that puts Norman Vincent Peale to shame, but have not love, I am a failure.

Even if I give my old clothes to Goodwill, and give a pint of blood to the Red Cross, but have no love, I am still hollow inside.

Agape love knows no limits. It is kind-

ness in the face of cruelty; it is hope in the depths of despair.

Today's doctrinal issues will fade away and, as imperfect humans, we will find others to debate. But when Jesus comes again, he will set things straight.

When I was an unbeliever, I was headed right for hell. But when I became a Christian, the Lord changed the direction of my life.

For the time being my understanding of God is limited, but Jesus will provide all the answers when I see him face to face. So now my heart is filled with faith, hope and love. But the best of all three is love.

— Stan Paregien

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GUN-TOTING MINISTERS

According to news reports, a dozen ministers were recently arrested for carrying concealed weapons into Canada while they were attending the National Baptist Convention in Detroit. Since the convention chairmen offered to take full responsibility because they failed to warn the delegates about Canadian gun laws, we may wonder if the customs officers only discovered the tip of the iceberg. There may be a better reason for this scary mess than we can think of, but perhaps we can still ask some questions.

The next time someone mentions the "big gun" in the pulpit, should we naturally think of a .357 Magnum?

Has defining sin as "missing the mark" taken on a new relevance in some churches?

"Is it really necessary to carry a gun when you travel around the United States?" This one was asked by the trial judge, speaking for many of us.

Can ministers, who presumably are close to God, be expected to show more love and discrimination when they open fire?

Do we need to develop a healing ministry to close up bullet holes left by impetuous disciples, following the example of Him who replaced the servant's ear?

Would the apostle who said "the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds" have to update his methods today, or did we just fail to notice that he prepared himself for the first-century version of a shootout?

In Shaw's *Major Barbara*, the commissioner of the Salvation Army, having received ten thousand pounds from a distiller and a maker of guns and gunpowder, says to the latter, "Come with us to the meeting. Barbara shall tell them that the Army is saved, and saved through you." This excellent line is worth pondering. Is not the same thing happening today — in more ways than one? Then let us ask one more Shavian question:

What price salvation?

—HGL

Apostolic Christianity: Then and Now

CHARLES R. GRESHAM

Grayson, Kentucky

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . . it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." So Charles Dickens characterized that age preceding and during the French Revolution. Such an evaluation could be made of our time as well. What we see about us often seems ominous, yet, at the same time, certain current trends are omens of hope.

This is true religiously as well as socially and politically. The bankruptcy of theological liberalism, the grinding to a halt of a growing organizational ecclesiasticism, and the impotence of a "social gospel" without a genuine "gospel" foundation have presented an opportunity for those who are committed to recovering the ancient gospel and the ancient order for the renewal of the twentieth-century church. There is a genuine resurgence of what is being called "evangelicalism." This movement is concerned with maintaining the full authority of Scripture. It is committed to doctrinal integrity and evangelistic fervor. But, its laissez-faire approach to the church, its ordinances, and its unity leaves much to be desired. Such a movement, rather than bringing an end to sectarianism, actually fosters it.

In May, 1977, the "Chicago Call" issued by some forty-five evangelicals was designed to call evangelicalism back to its historic Christian roots. Some eight issues were highlighted in this call, most of which

identified genuine failures within the fundamentalist-evangelical movement of the twentieth century (e.g. concern for "sacramental integrity" and "church unity").¹ Presumably, by returning to historic roots (particularly those seen in the post-apostolic or patristic period) and recognizing the Church's continuity with its preceding stages, evangelicals can recover both the apostolicity and catholicity of the church.

This move is praiseworthy in the main, but its attempt to embrace creedalism and the nascent hierarchical development of the patristic period (e.g., a single bishop as an authority in a given area) under the guise of apostolicity is somewhat disconcerting.² It is still extremely questionable whether there is any apostolic authority for these later developments either in doctrine or ecclesiastical order.

But at least the question of apostolicity is raised. What is it that makes the church apostolic? Is not this mark of the church the key to those other essential marks — oneness, holiness, and catholicity? Are we to assume that apostolicity means what Romanism and Anglicanism claim in apostolic succession? If so, how do we explain the diversity — even contradiction — of tradition with tradition and, particularly, tradition with that original tradition seen in the New Testament record? Are we not forced to say with Erwin L. Leuker that the apostles "Through the witness of

their word, will always be the norm and foundation on which Christ builds His Church (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 18:20, 21:14)."³

This was the contention of those pioneers of the Restoration Movement. In essence, Thomas Campbell was opting for this type of apostolicity when he wrote (in proposition three of the "Declaration and Address"):

nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them, in the Word of God. Nor ought anything be admitted, as of divine obligation, in their church constitution and management, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.

Alexander Campbell's "search for the Ancient Order" was an attempt to recover the apostolic pattern for the church and to follow it. Scott's recovery of the "Ancient Gospel" was in terms of apostolic testimony and experience.

Fred Kershner, the finest twentieth-century interpreter of the Restoration Plea, says, in a sermon on the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church":⁴

The reference to apostolicity is obviously an assertion of divine rather than human origin and structure . . . The nature of the organization and its essential features are preserved for us in the Scriptural records, and the latter, therefore, constitute a dependable and sure means by which the institution may be discerned.⁵

But, in light of the apostolic witness found in New Testament Scripture, there may be another way of viewing

apostolicity. This is by seeing apostolic Christianity as "first generation" Christianity. Certain basic characteristics are seen, both in the New Testament (apostolic) norm and in first generational Christianity since that time (as in revival, reformation, missionary advance, etc.). J.C. Hoekendijk, outstanding Dutch theologian and missiologist, asserts:

People pursue ecclesiology in the second generation;⁶ in the first generation, in times of revival, of reformation, and of missionary advance, people study Christology, think eschatologically, live doxologically, and speak of the Church without stress and with a certain ingenuousness, as of something that a seven-year-old child knows of, thank God.⁷

This is certainly the testimony of the New Testament. Christ was central, his way was followed, the implications of his life, death, and resurrection for their lives became the heart of the "apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). This studied commitment to Jesus Christ was not only because he was a master teacher, but also because he was Lord of history, king of a coming kingdom, and the judge who is standing at the door about to enter and begin his reign of justice and blessing. The New Testament is shot through with these eschatological emphases. It presents the early church as an eschatological community, faithful in mission and service between the times — the time of his first advent with its corollaries in resurrection and ascension and his second advent. Faithful to his lordship, occupying until he would come, these first generation Christians lived out their lives in praise, reflecting his glory.

I. Apostolic Christianity Is Christological

The testimony of the New Testament is that those early Christians "studied Christ." When the Christian community

became a reality (according to the Book of Acts) it was the result of believing in and obeying Jesus of Nazareth who was set

forth by the apostle Peter as both Christ (Messiah) and Lord.

The heart of that original proclamation was the person of Jesus. He was a "man approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22). "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). He was "delivered by the determinate counsel of God . . . taken, and by wicked hands . . . crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). But God raised him from the dead; for death could not hold him. Therefore, "God has made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The "heavens must receive (him) until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"; then, God will "send Jesus Christ" the same one who was crucified, raised from the dead, ascended and preached unto the nations (see Acts 3:20-21).

Responding to these great facts, these divine events, through faith and penitent obedience brought forgiveness and the refreshment of the gift of God's indwelling spirit (Acts 2:38). Such response was a response of faith — "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31) — which came "by hearing, and hearing the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17, NASV). It was a response of active faith, leading each believer to be immersed "in his name" (Acts 2:38), an immersion "into Jesus Christ . . . unto his death," a symbolic burial and resurrection ("like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life") (Rom. 6:3, 4).

Jesus Christ is central. By his power, miracles were performed in that apostolic period (Acts 3:6, 16, etc.). Through him,

and him alone, is there salvation, cleansing, forgiveness. Peter states it categorically: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

These themes, spelled out so clearly in that apostolic history written by Luke, are repeated in those occasional letters written by inspired apostles and apostolic men. Whether in Romans as the key to God's justifying process, in Ephesians as the agent of God's eternal purpose, in Colossians as the cosmic creator and redeemer, or in Hebrews as that superior High Priest "saving to the uttermost," Jesus Christ, the "same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), is the central fact of Christian faith and life. Commitment to him brings salvation and abundant life.

Because of his centrality, the apostolic church demanded more information about him. "Gospels" were written to meet this demand. Listen to Luke: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them to us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4). Those "things" are the events of Jesus' life. The apostle John would indicate his purpose in writing in this way: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30, 31).

These four "gospels" were circulated widely in the first and second centuries. They were even edited into one continuous story as early as the middle of the second

century.⁸ They provided the basis of study, the motivation for service, and the foundation for evangelism and outreach.

II. Apostolic Christianity Is Eschatological

The early Christians "thought eschatologically." The New Testament documents are stark evidence of this truth. Only Philemon (25 verses) and 3 John (15 verses) are without references to "hopes and expectations concerning the future and the 'last things.'"⁹

In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of his return within the contexts of cross-bearing service and the building of the church (Mt. 16:13-20). He answers those questions as to his return and the end of the world (presumed to occur when the temple would be destroyed) by showing that his followers would be called upon to suffer (Mt. 24:9-12), but the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations" before the end would come (Mt. 24:14). His parables of return and reward show unmistakably that the early church recognized that in the interim between his comings they were to "occupy til he came," to serve faithfully as good stewards. In fact, in Luke's introduction to the parable of the pounds (Lk. 19:11-13), Jesus is seen as teaching these truths because "he was nigh to Jerusalem and because (his disciples) thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." (Here, as Matthew Henry says of several of Jesus' parables, the "key hangs beside the door.")

In the book of Acts "last days" begin. After Jesus' ascension, at which there is an unmistakable promise that "this same Jesus" will return "in like manner" as they had seen him go, the Spirit is sent to begin this new age. Peter explains the

Pentecostal phenomena as the evidence of the reality of those "latter days" prophesied by Joel. They begin in the outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh; they will end in another baptism, a baptism of fire and judgment at Jesus' return. The last days extend from Pentecost to Parousia. During this time "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:19-21). The mission of the new community of Jesus is inaugurated from this eschatological base and prosecuted with this high motivation. The "now" of salvation is motivated by the future of a coming King and of certain judgment (see Acts 3:19-21; 17:30-31).

Paul's epistles simply explode with eschatological ideas. At least one-third of his writings contain definite eschatological ideas, thought and language. But Paul is not merely satisfying human curiosity in this basic content; he is pointing up the urgency of Christian proclamation and the imperative nature of Christian living. As C.K. Barrett says: "There is . . . a good deal in the epistles to suggest that Paul viewed the preaching of the Gospel, and the building up of the churches founded under its influence, as a part of the process of eschatology."¹⁰

What is true of Paul's letters is also true of much of the remainder of the New Testament. It is filled with eschatological hope and aspirations and sees the mission of God's new people in terms of these hopes. Even in letters (such as James) whose very purpose seems to inhibit any treatment of the future, the future and its pull upon the present is quite evident (see

Jas. 5:7-9). In the first epistle of John these great truths of past, present, and future are linked, showing how, even at the end of the apostolic period, that Christology and eschatology are intertwined. Because of that great and wondrous love bestowed upon us by the Father, we have become sons of God (1 Jn. 3:1). This is our present status; our future status has not been fully revealed (1 Jn. 3:2). But this is our assurance in Christ: "When he (Christ) shall come, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2). This is sufficient; for such "hope with regard to

Christ" makes it possible "to make oneself pure — as Christ is pure" (1 Jn. 3:3 TCNT).

First generation Christians "thought eschatologically." In a sense, every generation is a first generation in regard to the future. Whether the Lord comes during that generation or not (we know not the "times or seasons"), that generation will be ushered into the presence of the "Lord of all generations" to experience, then and later, a judgment of separation determined by their relationship to that "Lord of glory."

III. Apostolic Christianity Is Doxological

Those early Christians certainly "lived doxologically." One does not read far in the history of that primitive community before he sees open persecution beginning. The apostles are called before the Sanhedrin, threatened, and beaten for speaking "in the name of Jesus" and they departed "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:40, 41a). Paul and Silas are apprehended in Philippi, beaten, thrown into prison, their feet held fast by heavy leg irons, but "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God." Their praise and prayer was vocal enough that the other prisoners heard them (Acts 16:25).

What we find recorded in event is also emphasized in exhortation. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16), says the apostle Peter. He adds: "But and if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye" (3:4); repeating and reinforcing what he had heard his Lord say in that extended discourse called the "sermon on the mount" (see Mt. 5:10-12).

Paul, that late-blooming apostle, also

emphasizes the life of praise. Imprisoned in Rome, he writes a series of letters to churches he had established in his missionary labor. He urges the Philipians to "rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4) and to let their requests be made known unto God by "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" (4:6). He refers to his own example of exultation, and the contentment he knew in whatever state he found himself, whether abounding and filled or debased and suffering need (4:10-12). This was possible since he could do "all things through Christ who strengthened" him (4:13).

In that significant encyclical letter we call Ephesians, Paul states at the outset God's eternal purpose for his people through Christ. In doing so he uses the phrase "to the praise of his glory" to indicate the Christian's position and responsibility to the living God. God chose us, predestining us to adoption as children "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:4-6). He has made known to us the "mystery of His will" in that, in the fullness of time, he is gathering together all things in Christ. It is through Christ that we have obtained an inheritance upon our willing-

ness to believe the gospel. All this is "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:10-13). The Holy Spirit has been given us upon our obedient faith, and by this Spirit of Promise we have been sealed, given a down payment (an "earnest") of that inheritance that will be experienced in reality at the "redemption of the purchased possession" (at our resurrection; see Rom. 8:17-24). And all this divine activity and human response is "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13b-14).

IV. Conclusion

Just as in the apostolic age when Christian faith was new and vibrant, so it is in every first generation of the Christian community's thrust into the world. Those who were committed to God were finding deeper and deeper understanding of Jesus Christ, God's Son and God's answer to human sin and alienation. The deeper their understanding plunged, the greater awareness they developed of the thrust of the present toward the future. This led to greater dedication in service and mission as they saw their efforts as glorious, radiant witness (of God's praise and glory) to a world lost in darkness. Their proclamation and presence became a hymn of thanksgiving and praise booming out to peoples made deaf by their involvement in a materialistic secular system inspired by Satan, the great enemy of God.

Such "first generation" Christians need not be too greatly concerned about ecclesiology. They are church; they gather together to worship and praise, to remember Christ in the sacramental meal, to encourage and lift up one another, and to go forth from such gatherings to penetrate every level of society with the gospel.

Therefore, as God's new creation, we are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession," so that we might "show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Our lives of obedience and service are lives of praise, litanies of thanksgiving, doxologies sung by deed and not just by word. This is God's expectation of his own and the joyous response called forth by his divine action in Jesus Christ.

Dare we do less in our day than follow those apostolic, "first generation" guidelines set out in the inspired text of the New Testament? Being renewed by these New Testament documents as we recover their basic dynamic for unified growth in Christ is what it means to be "apostolic."

1. See Robert Webber and Donald Bloesch, eds., *The Orthodox Evangelicals: Who They Are and What They Are Saying* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

2. In *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), which is an interpretation by one of the leaders of this movement, Robert Webber maintains that apostolicity's function is "best approached with the second-century structure of the church in mind." In spelling this out, he says: "Because of the proliferation of the church, the ministers and deacons carry out the work of the ministry under the jurisdiction of the bishop and are answerable to him. The authority for ministry and sacraments is derived from Jesus but transmitted by the laying on of hands in the episcopate." (p. 68).

3. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, "Apostle," Volume 1, p. 117.

4. He is reflecting the phrase found in the Creed of Chalcedon (381) relative to the Church: "I believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church."

5. *Christian Standard*, October 22, 1938, pp. 1031-1032.

6. Hoekendijk may be overstating the case at this point, but if we think of ecclesiology as an inordinate attention given to order, organization, ministry, etc., he may be basically correct.

7. Quoted by Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (Studies on Biblical Theology, No. 47) (Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, Inc., 1965), p. 172fn.

8. Tatian's *Diatessaron*.

9. H.A. Guy, *The New Testament Doctrine of Last Things* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 173.

10. Quoted by Shires, *The Eschatology of Paul*, pp. 167-168.

The Problem of Not Suffering

HOY LEDBETTER

One of the senior saints recently confessed that his greatest suffering in the last few years had resulted from having to listen to his brethren discuss the problem of suffering. I have no complaint with those who keep this subject on the agenda, even if it does come up a bit too often to suit some of us who have been reviewing it for years, but I do wish we would give more attention to a facet of the problem which is almost never discussed, even though it has serious implications for our everyday happiness and future wellbeing. And that is the problem of our own negative attitude toward suffering.

Several years ago German theologian Helmut Thielicke expressed his opinion that we Americans have a peculiar weakness: we do not know how to suffer. And my contemplation of that proposition during the years since has convinced me that he was right, that we are indeed unwilling to come to terms with the inevitability of suffering and death.

Look at the way we face the aging process. Many of us will undertake expensive, painful, and sometimes downright ridiculous measures in our futile attempts to check the toll of the years, and we are distressed and embarrassed when we seem to be losing the battle. Aging and death are totally unacceptable to us; surely we have a pill somewhere to protect us from them!

This widespread attitude — as Thielicke pointed out — is not lost on the young people who must learn from their elders how to live. If we have (or at least think we should have) pills and potions for all of

life's discomforts, then it is unreasonable to expect youth to suffer without remedy. This outlook is not without ethical implications. For example, when one begins to mature sexually and feels the pressure of desire, he naturally wants — and has been conditioned to expect — quick relief. He is psychologically unprepared to endure the pain of waiting for marriage, and our moral and practical arguments against premarital intercourse are no match against his inherited conviction that suffering is inappropriate and unreasonable.

Thielicke felt (and not without some justification) that this reluctance to accept our own suffering as a tolerable part of our existence has had a considerable effect on our widespread indifference to abortion. I do not wish to make light of the finely-honed ethical decisions which sometimes have to be made in this regard, but it does seem to be the case that abortions often occur for no better reason than that the parties involved cannot accept the legitimacy of human suffering.

How Account for It?

But if this unwillingness to suffer is a national problem, how do we account for it? And what can be done about it? Also, does not the assertion that we must learn to suffer lend support to the old accusation that Christianity is a joyless burden and that God does not really care when we are miserable?

As a matter of act, it is only by assuming the right attitude toward suffering that we

can escape the misery that is already a huge part of our lives. Note the following contrast: according to James 1:2, Christians *count it all joy* when they encounter various trials, whereas, according to 2 Peter 2:13, bogus believers *count it a pleasure* to revel in the daytime. The New Testament repeatedly stresses that Christians experience joy even in the face of severe difficulties, but they are not at home with pleasure, for that word (as a translation of the Greek *hedone*, from which we get "hedonism") always denotes a vice in the Bible.

Different Codes

The Christian is through with pleasure. It is nothing more than an aspect of our pre-Christian past, in which "we once were . . . enslaved to various lusts and pleasures (Tit. 3:3). "Lusts and pleasures" (lust is pleasure sought; pleasure is lust satisfied) describe the state of slavery — not liberation — which holds those who are not yet bound to God by his grace. A society thus given over to carnal and material things breeds so much animosity that its members reside in the social pits: "hateful" and "hating one another."

According to Peter, the Christian is distinguished from the pagan by his determination to "no longer live for the lusts of men, but for the will of God," and by his reckoning that "the time already past is sufficient for us to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles." Note how he sets "the desire of the Gentiles" in opposition to "the will of God." The Christian and the pagan live by entirely different codes.

But this distinction between saint and sinner is not absolute, for while a life enslaved to pleasures is a characteristic of one who deliberately rejects God's will,

the church itself is not wholly free from such slavery. As a matter of fact, when Peter spoke of those who "count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime," he referred to certain spurious disciples who were disgracing (and dis-gracing) the church of God in the name of liberation.

Someone has said that the church is like Noah's ark: if it wasn't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the stink inside. We must come to grips with our weaknesses. It is shocking that daylight debauchery, frowned upon even by Roman society, should receive an approving glance from within the Christian community, but it did. Unalloyed lust, decked out in a religious garb and shunning the "decent obscurity" afforded by darkness, intruded into "the heavenly places in Christ" and not only thought, but taught, that the epitome of pleasure was to revel in the daytime.

The practices of these church-going hedonists show their disregard for both saint and sanctuary. First, it is said that "they carouse with you." The original text is in dispute at this point, but whether the true reading is that they were revelling in the "love-feasts" (NASV margin) or in "deceptions" (NASV text) is not materially important, for surely the

Season of Resurrection

The rain falls down
on cold lifeless ground
Where once there was no light
now bursts forth in brilliant white
the warming life of earth's new sun.

Fear drowns our hope
in God's silent power
which faced the last enemy and
now bursts forth in brilliant form
the warming earth of Life's new Son.

— G.B. Earl

context implies that the fellowship meal of the early church had been so corrupted by boisterous, drunken merrymaking that it was only a pseudo-love-feast, a mere mockery.

As if that were not bad enough, these errorists are further described as "having eyes full of adultery (literally, of an adulteress)." They lust after every woman they see and wish themselves in bed with her. So caught up are they in the vicious circle of pleasure that their eyes "never cease from sin." Their lust is never satisfied, and in their pathetic restlessness they lust more and more. Such is the futility — and *the suffering* — of pleasure.

Misdirected Love

But Peter was not the only apostle who had to stand up to hedonists among the brethren. In a similar expose of the gadding church in 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Paul catalogues the shocking sins of the egotistical apostates and stresses their misdirected love. In his lengthy enumeration they are first styled "self-lovers" and "money-lovers" and finally designated "pleasure-lovers rather than God-lovers." Self-centeredness, materialism, and pleasure have replaced God in their affections and resulted in complete moral corruption.

When self becomes the center of life, not only does obligation to God vanish, but man also loses his sense of duty to others. While each of the terms in Paul's list of errors points to tragic degeneration, none is more pathetic than the one he places right in the middle: "irreconcilable." No power in heaven or on earth can stem their revolt against God or bridge their alienation from their brethren. They are so wrapped up in themselves and so disdainful of any claims of their fellow Christians that no peacemaker can gain a

toehold with them. Uncompromising they are,

and more inexorable far
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea.

But these implacable professors are not without a rationale. While it is obvious to us that they have rejected the authentic gospel, they are actually preaching and practicing what they consider to be the true faith; and it is a part of Paul's indictment that the church rituals are not ruled out by, but are made subservient to, their selfishness. They have "a form of religion" in which all the usual activities of church life are maintained, and their ability to talk about God while practicing devotion to themselves may deceive the very elect.

Somehow Christianity has always survived such perverted practitioners. And if Paul's persistence is a model for us, who sometimes today must gape in amazement at our presumptuous brethren, we must not faint under the burden of God's reconciling work because we become disgusted with those who claim his name. It is our business to fulfill our ministry; it is his to judge and reward each person.

First Failure

Nevertheless it is important to our ministry to ask: how do we account for the presence of such people in the church? Were they always that way — not really converted — or did they somehow degenerate after experiencing the new birth? And how can people "whose God is their belly" maintain their profession of religion? How can they go to church, and especially how can they pray, without being touched? Why does not God's will prevail upon them through their reading of the Bible and all the hours of preaching and teaching in the assemblies?

Brethren who earn the designation "pleasure-lovers rather than God-lovers"

fail in two areas of communion: (1) they do not properly listen when God speaks, and (2) they do not properly speak when God listens. In other words, they err in relation to the word of God and prayer. Let's look at how this happens.

In explaining the parable of the sower, Jesus said that the seed which fell among thorns "are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Lk. 8:14).

Although these people are under the productive influence of the word of God, the thorns grow up at the same time, and — slowly, after a prolonged struggle — the thorns prevent the completion of God's plan for them. There is a gradual surrender to the forces which separate from God and choke out faith. Three such forces are mentioned:

(1) "Worries." Failing to take God at his word, they begin to give priority to matters which are not related to his reign in the world.

(2) "Riches." Mark's version refers to "the deceitfulness" — or "the (pleasant) illusion" — "of riches." More and more they think in materialistic terms and are occupied with making money. The ever-present danger of this counterattraction to the gospel is indicated by the question Jesus' disciples asked: "Then who can be saved?"

(3) "Pleasures." Absorption with pleasures, even when intentions are good, keeps us from listening when God speaks. These pleasures need not be such as would be considered immoral by either church or society.

The people considered here are not openly hostile to the word, but they are more like the doubleminded man of James 4:8. They are not sure of which way to turn, and as often as not they turn away

from "the will of God" to "the desire of the Gentiles." This passage tells us how people can go to church, read the Bible, pray, and even be Christian propagandists, and still keep moving more and more toward corrupt practices that will shock even the gazing pagans. They do not necessarily give up their "form of religion"; on the contrary, church ritual may be dedicated to a magnitude opposed to the will of God.

Second Failure

But let us turn to the second aspect of failure in communion.

For the past thirty years I have walked along the battle lines of warring brethren, watched them assault one another, and even listened to them brag about their kill ratio. I have seen the church multiply by dividing, and have pondered the sad fact that in some areas there is not one congregation that does not owe its origin to a split. And I have been amazed to observe new groups rise up in an atmosphere of warm embracing love that promises to bear all things to cover a multitude of sins, and to last through eternity, and then suddenly start quarrelling and choosing sides and viciously tearing themselves apart.

How can this happen? How can the love of brethren wax so cold that iniquity begins to abound among them?

Let's set the record straight. We usually try to put these fusses in a more glorious light than they deserve. Although we frequently blame them on doctrinal differences, I have never seen one of our congregations divide over a doctrinal issue that would have kept the apostles apart. The idea of giving God credit for our division by claiming that bloodthirsty brethren are only maintaining loyalty to the faith may be an attractive mantle to

throw over our shameful dissensions, but the facts will not support it. Neither can we usually blame our warfare on the more respectable sin of religious exclusionism.

The real reason we fight and make war is exactly what James said long ago: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Jas. 4:1-3).

James intensely insists that every battle which plagues church or society — surely now as well as then — may be traced to one root sin: pleasure. He alludes to an atmosphere in which various individuals with conflicting pleasures wrestle for satisfaction. And when pleasure, rather than God, is the primary concern of the human personality, intense conflict will inevitably result.

Specifications

The frustrations and crimes that may follow this preoccupation with pleasure are spelled out in James 4:1-3:

(1) "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder." This is such a strong statement (and all the more so if the reference is to church members) that many scholars believe the original text should be corrected from "murder" (*phoneute*) to "envy" (*phthoneite*). But this view simply fails to recognize the extent to which pleasures can disrupt human relationships. The statement is a grave warning about how very close we may be to destroying people. Those who are under the control of pleasure will take advantage of the law and of loopholes in

the law (if there are any), and they will not hesitate to violate the law as long as pleasure will be the result (i.e., when no penalty will be exacted). The pleasure-lover will resort to any *practical* means to achieve his ends.

This is why Christians can set out to totally ruin one another, and may even physically assault each other. The latter possibility was demonstrated several months ago in my own home, when one sister laid violent hands upon another. Since the desires within an individual are a complex composite, lust which leads to violence may be kept secret for a long time, until its cover is blown by some sudden pressure. Actions which defy popular opinion and the rights of others are not all that far from murder, and because they can so easily occur among us we need James' warning today.

(2) "And you are envious (or possibly, strive with envious greed) and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." If "lust" in the preceding statement means a desire to have, perhaps "envious" here may connote a desire that the other person *not* have, since envy may be defined as dissatisfaction at the prosperity of another. As John Lyly put it, "The greatest harm that you can do unto the envious is to do well."

The envious person who is driven by a desire to surpass rather than by a desire to possess will always create conflict, not so much over what he wants for himself as over what he is determined that the other person will not have. Although he may be very subtle about it, being careful that disclosure of his motives will not cause him embarrassment or frustrate his purpose, he will do everything in his power to see that the other person does not succeed. It is easy to see how this motivation will work against anyone who has a leadership position in the church; his

ministry might be neutralized for years without anyone realizing what was happening until his adversary makes a more aggressive effort to do away with him. The envious person may become so obsessed with bringing about his opponent's downfall that he will go to considerable expense and even risk his own personal humiliation to bring him down. He must be top dog, even if that means that no dog will rise very high.

(3) "You do not have because you do not ask." The hedonist, like an incompetent physician who tries to cure his own disease, always suffers much at his own hands, because he vainly relies on his own efforts rather than on God. And his efforts seem to deny the fact that our earthly life is given to us by God, and we may therefore petition him for its enhancement. Since he is controlled by a force which stands in opposition to God, we should not expect him to be very interested in prayer as a means of communion with God (he may pray for other reasons). The hedonist's problem, then, is that he does not pray. Or does he?

(4) "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." The pleasure-lover's prayer is merely an instrument of his earthly desires and is for that reason no real prayer at all. When he seeks he will not find; when he knocks nobody will open; for his prayer is nothing that God can listen to, since it is an act of revolt against God's will. But the very fact that James refers to this vain prayer shows that extremely selfish people, whose disordered personalities may compel them to disparage and hurt other Christians, can be very punctual in prayer. However, God does not value our prayers for their eloquence or their frequency, but for the good intentions behind them.

The cost of pleasure is beyond calculation. There is no means of weighing the misery-making mistakes of those who constantly strive to obtain or to keep others from obtaining. But it is not simply a question of harming others, for to say that the proponent of pleasure is not a good candidate for suffering is not to say that he does not suffer. In fact, his suffering is considerable, and much of it is the direct result of his pleasure-seeking practices; but it is not something he is willing to accept. Consequently hedonists are not a happy lot. God-lovers, on the other hand can and do "greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible" even when they are "distressed by various trials." Their happiness can stand up against anything.

If it is true that not knowing how to suffer is our national problem, then is that not so because our preoccupation with self-centered living, material advantage, and pleasure is directly opposed to the course prescribed by Him who alone can show us how to really live? We can get back on the track only when we learn to listen when he speaks, and speak in such a way that he can listen.

Offering

O Jesus, giver
Of sanctifying Spirit Divine,
Unto Thy care
I commit
All of Thee,
In me,
That Thou doth find.

O my Saviour,
Accept this
My offering to Thee,
Ressurrect, and
Set me free.

— Gary Fields Mitchell

LETTERS

Women's Questions

Tom Lane did a fine service in stating and answering our "Cosmic Questions" in the April-May issue of *Integrity*. Just the other day my barber was asking me, "How can I find my significance in the universe? Others muse more subtly. But Tom is probably right to suggest that we all raise such heaven-searching issues from time to time.

That is why I wish he would have addressed all of us. But by the orientation of his entire article toward men and their relationship to God he has inadvertently (I hope) left women wondering if they are allowed to ask these questions. Are they to benefit from some of the answers men are given in these pages?

I think we need to be reminded that not only men seek their place in the universe. Women do too. Not only are men created in God's image and for fellowship with God. Women are too. And not only are men the objects of God's love and plan for joy, work and dominion on this planet. Women are too.

Or do we already know all this? Then we need a different kind of reminder. Not only is language the product of human communities. Human beings and communities are also the product of language. Specifically, we very subtly communicate to one another that women still are not quite as worthy as men when we choose not to use inclusive language to speak of human beings. To refer to persons only as "man," "him," "he" (seventy times by my count), never once hinting that women are also persons, is oppressive.

Sure, we mean men and women by saying *Man!* Why not say "men and women" (or take a real risk — "women and men")? Why not choose language that will be in-

clusive of people of both sexes? It is not difficult to do if we want to do it.

I "picked on" Tom Lane's article because it was an easy target. That may be unfair. But would it not be a loving gesture for *Integrity* to adopt an editorial policy that encourages its writers to clearly address their language to women readers as well as men readers?

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Open Questions

I appreciated the astute perspective of Tom Lane in his recent article entitled "Cosmic Questions." I suppose that many inquisitive, perceptive Christians have struggled with the issues raised in his article. The problem is that these issues have only been discussed in private circles for fear of the unsettling effect it would have upon other less inquisitive brothers and sisters (a fear that is not at all unfounded).

Unfortunately, the absence of such a frank and open discussion has been even more unsettling. For when a bright, young student begins to explore the ever expanding realm of scientific research or an older person simply subscribes to *National Geographic* they inevitably encounter a barrage of questions for which the traditional church generally offers only illogical, pat answers. It is as if we must protect God from His overly inquisitive creation. That scientists will eventually discover some overwhelmingly conclusive fact that will draw back the curtain to God and reveal that the awesome and terrifying voice of Sinai, clouded in fire and smoke, is actually a balding, little man in a projection booth.

We must constantly remind ourselves, even in the midst of uncertainty, that our very lives are founded upon the premise (whether we acknowledge it or not) that the "truth" of God will always bear close scrutiny. I am indebted to Tom Lane for persuasively and concisely making that point.

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