

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is basically a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as he is one.

Integrity

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Integrity

John Peraz' Atonement

John Peraz had never encountered a burglar. But he knew his neighbors had suffered breakins, and he was particularly disturbed at the report that a prowler in his community had bound the parents of a young woman and then raped her and beat her to death. So John decided he would protect his property, and especially his daughter.

He bought an automatic shotgun and placed it, loaded, under his bed. When he retired at night he contemplated how he would move if he heard someone forcing his way into his house. As he planned his strategy, the mental picture of his encounter heightened his fear.

Early one morning it happened. He heard a bump down the hall. Quickly but quietly springing into action, he grabbed the shotgun and eased open his bedroom door. A few steps away a dark figure moved toward him

with a long knife. Terrified, John blasted away with his shotgun. When he finally turned on the light he saw his daughter lying dead, clutching her curling iron in her right hand.

Fear may cause us to destroy what we try to save.

John began an unending quest for atonement. He became a Christian, and tried to live the straightest life possible, but he never found enough evidence for what he could not believe in — his own forgiveness.

So, when a visiting minister denounced his church's laxity in allowing divorced members to remarry and aroused anxiety about the church's future, John was ready to prove he was not lax — as far as dividing the church, retiring the minister who had converted him, and driving out some of his best friends. And when the smoke of battle had cleared, and only a few were left, and another fear had been dealt with, John once again began his quest for atonement. —HGL

Editorial: Some Thieves We Have Met

The Chosen Race

Tom Lane

The Missing Ingredient in the Church

Grayson H. Ensign

Comments on An Open Letter

Hoy Ledbetter

John Perez' Atonement

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Jan.-Feb., 1982
Vol. 13, No. 4

SOME THIEVES WE HAVE MET

In the early 18th century John Dennis wrote a play for which he devised some mechanical thunder. The play failed, but a few nights later Dennis heard his thunder being used in another production. He protested, "They will not let my play run, but yet they steal my thunder!"

We have not lost our thunder, and we ordinarily do not think of ourselves as victims of crime, but members of my immediate family have been ripped off several times during the past few months.

Our older daughter lost two guitars in a break-in. Our older son had the wheels stolen off his new car while we sat a few feet away. Our younger son was relieved of an expensive calculator. \$300 disappeared from my wife's purse. And so on.

It has long been said that in this world the big thief condemns the little thief, and I think that is a part of our problem. Often the symbols of authority who are supposed to uphold law and order are regarded as rip-off artists who have been able to cover up their misdeeds or who have used the law to appropriate the belongings of others. It is easy to follow a multitude to do evil when models of righteousness are so hard to see.

And that is where the church comes in, "for God wants you to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people by the good things you do." Moreover, "your conduct among the heathen should be so good that when they accuse you of being evildoers, they will have to recognize your good deeds and so praise God on the Day of his coming."

The emphasis of these quotations is on deed, not word. They remind us of Paul's charge to Timothy: "Be an example." What good does it do to talk of ethical responsibility if nobody seems to believe it, even the church? We must make it clear that our lives are dedicated to the things we talk about. I can think of no better way to resist the wave of crime which is rolling across our nation.

We are very much encouraged by the many fine comments we have received on the past two issues dealing with fellowship. And we are also grateful for the number of responses we have received to our request for financial help. We are bound to once more thank you for your past and future contributions. They are assisting a work for which there is a widespread feeling of need.

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Hoy Ledbetter

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GOD'S OWN PEOPLE

Part One: The Chosen Race

TOM LANE
Cincinnati, Ohio

What is the church? Were we to ask a number of church-goers this question, we might be surprised at the diversity of answers we would receive.

Many people, for example, appear to regard the church as a certain sort of building in which a certain type of ritual exercise is conducted. To others, the church is a hierarchy or structure of ministers, boards, councils, bishops, and local, regional and national headquarters, the institutional machinery of which Sunday services are only the elementary expression. Some think of the church as a social gathering, a focus of tradition in an uncertain world, or, by contrast, a rallying-point for humanitarian calls for social action and change.

None of these answers, though, gets at the real essence of the church. The church is neither a place, a liturgy, nor a hierarchy, although it may in some of its cultural expression own buildings, develop beautifully expressive forms of worship, and function with certain officers. These outward forms, however, are subject to change to meet people's real needs in changing culture. And since the church's forms and structures must be responsive to the inner life of its

people, it cannot be an island of comforting tradition in the wind-swept sea of changing culture. As people's lives and needs change, so must the church target its preaching and adjust its forms, although it does not compromise its timeless gospel message which, when its applications to people's real life situations are explained, can satisfy the fundamental needs of people in all ages and cultures. The church is not simply a social club, either; its fellowship reaches deeper than that. And while the truths of the gospel may have their social and political implications, the church does not exist only to engage in social activism, but to ground every aspect of people's lives in proper relationship with God.

How does the New Testament, our final authority on the matter, describe the church? What is the church's essence? The Scriptures speak of the church as a body of people brought together as a result of the saving action of God. So assembled, people of faith experience a special relationship and fulfill certain responsibilities toward God and toward one another.

One of the New Testament's grandest declarations of the nature and meaning of the church is 1 Peter

2:9: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The church is a race, a nation, a people or society, and at that, a people of God's own; or, as the marginal reading of this verse indicates, "a people for his possession." The church is the community of faithful persons living in company with God and with each other.

What does this mean, a "people"?

"The people of God," "the chosen nation." These descriptions of the church sound very much like descriptions we have heard applied to the ancient nation of Israel. The concept of the church as a people is rooted in the Old Testament understanding of the identity and purpose of Israel. Israel was a nation whose identity came not just from its racial heritage or from its indigenous culture, in the way that people in some countries today feel proud of their roots in their ethnic lineage or historic customs. Israel found her identity and mission in her relationship to the Lord. Indeed, much of Israel's culture, her folkways and customs, derived from divinely-appointed moral and ceremonial laws. God's truth formed the people's common perspective upon life. The ten commandments were the law of the land.

The people of Israel rightly regarded themselves as God's loving concern. They viewed their mission, individual and national, as consisting in obedience and worship to God. It is true, sadly, that sometimes Israel came to think of God's love as unconditional. Israel then lost her conscientious zeal for God's ways while smugly expecting His protection, failing to see that His

care was a privilege to be lived up to. Israel also frequently failed to recognize that God's grace could extend to all nations, to whoever might have faith in Him. Divine Judgment often came upon Israel to admonish her. Yet chastisement itself was a sign of God's love, of His persistent desire to correct and teach the people that they might be fit for fellowship with Him.

Christians, too, are a community formed for fellowship with God. We, like ancient Israel, may find our identity and meaning in service to our God.

It is sometimes mistakenly said that in Old Testament times God dealt with mankind on the level of races and nations, but that in these days after Christ He deals with individuals, offering salvation not to nations but to persons. God did in ancient times convey His laws and mediate His care and correction through the agency of social convention and civil government, specifically the theocentric government of Israel. But each Israelite had to personally approach God for salvation, and to offer worship out of his own faith. The Old Testament prophets rebuked their people when they kept to ritual forms while abandoning the spirit of devotion which gives life and meaning to forms. But each Israelite's own devotion was reinforced by, and found joyful fellowship in, the faith of others. Thus individual faith was the foundation for the nation's sense of consecration.

Today, while each of us must rely upon his own faith as the basis upon which he comes before God, none of us lives his Christian life alone. We enjoy a common understanding because of our "like precious faith." Our individual worship of God merges into a vibrant community

expression of praise to Him. We support one another in our Christian convictions through mutual exhortation and admonition. The church is a community, a movement, a *people*, for we have a common culture of faith.

Let us consider in greater detail the meaning of our identity as the people of God. What great things does He have in store for us as His people? How should we live that we might fulfill and express to the world at large our special relationship with Him? How do we relate to one another as fellow members of His chosen nation? An understanding of what it means for us to be God's people will help us to fulfill our nature and mission as the church.

Our text from Peter's epistle gives us a good starting point for discovering what it means for us to be God's people. One way in which we might explore our relationship with Him and with one another is to consider the meaning of the three images or figures of the church which Peter lists in conjunction with his declaration that we are "God's own people." Peter states that we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." What do these images teach us about our blessings and responsibilities as God's community?

The elect of God

Each of Peter's images highlights the fact that the Christian church exists because of divine action. That we are a "priesthood" points out that it is God's service which gives our lives and our life together meaning. Our national spirit is righteousness, our life as a community is guided by the principle of devotion to God, our identity as a nation consists in obedience to our Lord's directives; we are a

"holy nation." But the one figure of the church which most strongly communicates that it is God, in His initiative toward us and acceptance of our response to Him, who constitutes us a special people to Himself, is the image of the church as "a chosen race."

New Testament writers often allude to Christians as people chosen by God, elected by God, predestined by God to certain things. What are the dynamics involved in this divine election? How does God choose or elect us? And to what, exactly, are we chosen?

The most thorough-going brand of that theological system known as Calvinism asserts that a wholly sovereign God decides who shall and who shall not be saved, without reference to anyone's prior faith or consent, or lack of it. Human choice and personal response in the matter are, under this view, irrelevant. God gives faith to whomever He wishes. On the other hand, scholars who believe that God is the Sovereign of the universe but not so arbitrary that He denies human freedom of will, interpret Biblical references to predestination as saying that God simply plans or predetermines that people who out of their faith approach Him shall in virtue of their faith receive eternal life. In this view, predestination means that God decides what He will do for those who freely come to Him, not that He decides to draw only certain people to Himself and to preclude others from salvation.

It does not seem compatible with His creative and redemptive purposes that God would unconditionally decide who will be saved. The best explanation for God's purpose in making mankind was that He intended to design creatures with whom He could share His love.

Accordingly, He made men and women with free will, so that we might understand His love for us to be a free gift on His part, and so that we might be able (should we choose to do so) to love Him, not as robots, but voluntarily, as responsible selves. Thus would our love for Him be of the same sort as His love for us. And now, for that purpose of sharing love with responsible creatures to be accomplished, He respects human freedom by offering reconciliation of sinners with Himself only to those who will freely receive it. He forces Himself upon no one, nor will He reject anyone who answers His offer of salvation.

How, then, do we interpret those Scripture passages which sound as though God chooses people for salvation? These teach that God in His omniscience knows who will accept Him, and determines to grant great spiritual blessings to these persons who will freely meet His conditions for salvation. God elects the church as a corporate body of faithful individuals, to be an instrument in His service declaring His glory by proclaiming the saving work of Christ. The members of the church, then, are those whom, through His foreknowledge of who will accept His offer of grace, God ordains, because of their response, to receive His gift of salvation, to share the glory of the risen Christ.²

God chooses each of us, in view of our voluntary personal faith, to receive His blessings, and to be joined with others of faith in the community which is His spiritual nation. What are the blessings He has chosen to confer upon us? He determines to forgive our sins through the blood of Christ which He has provided for this end, so that He might regard us as now guiltless in His sight; and He has chosen

therefore to adopt us as His sons and daughters (Eph. 1:4,5; 1 Pet. 1:2). His choice also includes responsibilities for us. He has determined that we should live lives appropriate to our salvation, appropriate indeed to His own holy nature. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Chosen and called

While speaking of the church as God's chosen race, the apostle Peter, in the same verse, speaks of another side of the process by which we come to be constituted as God's people. God *calls* us to Himself. We are "a chosen race . . . that (we) may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvelous light." God's "choice" refers to His decision to bless those who receive Him. The description of the church as "a chosen race" refers to our standing as ones who have responded to His offer of forgiveness and fellowship. God's "call" to us is the means by which He makes effective His election or choice. Having predestined that those who have faith will be justified (that is, declared just, or free of condemning guilt) through the work of Christ, God calls for participants in His plan (Rom. 8:29,30). Through His call He makes available to us the salvation He deigns to confer (Acts 2:39). His call, of course, is this: believe in the Person and power of Christ, repent of your sins, and commit yourselves to Me!

God's call is commensurate with His election. He elects that He shall grant life with Himself to those who would have it; He calls us to embrace the gift of present and

eternal fellowship with Himself. He also calls us to serve Him, to live holy lives of productive spiritual labor as He has foreordained.

That God's call summons us to servanthood as well as to blessing is hinted in the very word by which the church is often named in the New Testament. That word, *ekklesia*, means "the called-out ones." Consider how this word itself teaches us of our duties.

In the ordinary usage of the first century Greek-influenced world, *ekklesia* meant an assembly convened to discuss a legal issue or to determine community policy, such as a town meeting, a convocation of citizens "called out" by a city official. In a secondary, broader sense, the term could be used to denote any gathering of persons. We see the word used in these ways in the New Testament. In Acts 19 it is applied by the town clerk to the unruly crowd at Ephesus which opposed Paul (verses 32, 41), and then to the regular city council (verse 39). In Hebrews 2:12, *ekklesia* is employed to denote the congregation of Israel, in a rendering of Psalm 22:22. The political or secular term *ekklesia* came to have a special religious usage by the early Christian writers, through its appearance in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament circulating at the time the church began. In the Septuagint the term was used to translate the Hebrew word for a group of people specially summoned together, as an administrative assembly, a military muster, or the congregation of the people for worship.³

The church is the *ekklesia*, the assembly of "called-out ones." The word makes us think of other occasions when God has "called out" people to be with Him. The

term evokes the image of God's call to Abraham to come out from his native country to a new land, there to spawn a people reserved for God's service. The word reminds us of God's call to Israel to come out from bondage in Egypt to populate Palestine as a special people for the Lord. It recalls the ancient prophets' frequent calls to Israel to "come out from among" pagan practices to observe God's ways. By its connotation that an authoritative summons, a calling-out, is the cause of believers being constituted as an assembly, and because it reminds us of God's call to people of faith throughout Biblical history to come away from worldly ways in order to practice holiness, this term *ekklesia* indicates that we, too, are called by high authority to come out from a corrupt world-order, to stand in a special relationship with God. His call is meant to lead us out from spiritual ignorance and moral disorientation into the way of truth and service. He calls us "out of darkness into his marvelous light." Thus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14).

Note, particularly in this last reference, once again, that our Christian identity is a corporate quality as well as an individual reality. God calls us to live holy lives, and this each of us must do. But we are also called to be a pure and dedicated community. As each of us practices holiness, so the whole church may be typified as holy. As the church, the assembly of believers, is chosen and called by God to be dedicated to His service, so must each of us, as a member of the people of God, live up to the community's ideal. Indeed, on a

very practical level, our own personal lives of purity and obedience to God may be nourished through our association with the Christian community. Each of us draws encouragement for holy and purposeful living from his sisters and brothers in the faith. We "stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

Making it happen

How do we make real in our lives our identity as people chosen by God and called out from the corrupt course of the world to be His own possession? We must "lead a life worthy of God, who calls us into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. Eph. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:11). We pattern our thoughts and conduct, not according to the world's norms (Rom. 12:2), but according to the example of Christ. Though living in the midst of a world where selfish desires are considered ends to be satisfied by any means that works, we live by high standards of purity and integrity, with God's fellowship as our goal. Surrounded by a world riven by pride, prejudice, selfishness, and fear, we pursue fearless, free uplifting communion with one another, rejoicing in our common faith as we encourage one another to be holy.

We, the church, are the called and

chosen ones of God. While the question whether or not God arbitrarily or unconditionally chooses us to salvation is useful for our doctrinal understanding, it is unfortunate that debate sometimes distracts our attention so that we fail to catch sight of the awesome glory of what it means for us to be chosen of God. Just think of it! The great God of the universe wants to be with us. He wants us to be His people. He has created man in His image as a free moral agent so that we might receive and join in true, unconstrained, rapturous self-giving love with Himself. He has sent Christ to atone for our sins so that all roadblocks to our eternal life with Him might be removed. That we are God's chosen, means that God chooses to give Himself to us. For us to recognize ourselves as God's chosen, is to know the dignity and joy of fellowship with God. Behold the unspeakable love of God, that He should make us His children (1 John 3:1)! Let us pursue holy lives appropriate to ones whom God has thus so richly honored. And let us praise His grace!

¹All Scripture quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version*.

²Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election," *Grace Unlimited*, Clark H. Pinnock, ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), pp. 54f., 58, 61f.

³J.M. Furness, *Vital Words of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 47-49.

The Missing Ingredient in the Church

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What would you think about a congregation that pads its attendance figures to appear successful "because that attracts people"?

What would you think about a Christian leader who wrote a book and while it was in process had proved to him that his attack on a

brother in that book was false and slanderous; yet said that it was too late, that the book had already gone to the publisher, so no change was made?

What would you think about a congregation that doesn't preach repentance because it might result in fewer baptisms?

What would you think about a missionary who reports that there were 100 "responses to the Gospel," knowing full well that most Americans are going to understand that to mean baptisms, of course, yet in this situation it only means someone walked down the aisle for prayer or some other purpose?

What do you think is lacking in a brother who affirms what he knows his Christian brother has denied in writing? The list can go on and we can get uncomfortably close to each of us.

What's the problem, brethren? INTEGRITY. That's the missing ingredient, I believe, in all of these cases that I've given to you. And they are real cases; they're not fictional, though I wish they were.

Biblical teaching

Let's go to the Bible and see if it says anything on this subject. In Psalms 41:12 the psalmist says, "As for me, Thou dost uphold me in my integrity, and Thou dost set me in Thy presence forever." Proverbs 19:1 declares, "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool." Also we read in Proverbs 11:3, "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them." The Scriptures clearly teach that integrity is a Christlike quality and that God expects all of His people to have it.

Webster defines integrity as, "A state or quality of being complete, undivided, unbroken, moral soundness, honesty, uprightness, without duplicity, without deceit, and without corruption." That sounds like high quality virtue, and I want that quality in me, to characterize my life. Don't we all want to say with the psalmist, "I have walked in my integrity"?

One of the grand privileges of my life has been to teach the book of Job. Consider this Old Testament saint, "And Yahweh said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him, to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). "*He holds fast to his integrity!*" There are not many Jobs around, but we must become Job-like and apostle-like. We've got to let the Holy Spirit develop us to have the integrity of character that Jesus had, to follow His perfect example of moral wholeness, if we are going to be His approved disciples today.

Christ's example and teaching

Christ, of course, is our perfect example in this, for He had perfect and total obedience to the Father. There was no deceit in Him, no duplicity, no failure, and no corruption. There was total moral soundness, and that's why He's our perfect Teacher and our Savior. He said, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father . . ." (John 8:49). He also said, ". . . I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent me," and "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 5:30c; 8:29b). He stood before his enemies and said what none of us

can say, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" No one said a word, not even those who hated him and wanted to kill him. They couldn't touch him because he had integrity of character and life.

Christ-like integrity is a singleness of eye. Jesus explained that point in Matthew 6:22, "The lamp of the body is the eye, if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light." I think He is talking about integrity, moral soundness, singleness of commitment to the will of God and refusing to be swayed by personal interest or expediency. Verse 24 says, "No one can serve two masters." That's the matter of integrity. (How many masters have you and I got?)

Integrity is required of *all* disciples of Jesus. It's a must. Remember how Jesus laid it on people lovingly, but very strongly, in Luke 14:25ff. for example. Great multitudes were going with him, and he turned to them and said (I paraphrase), "Have you got integrity? What are you doing following me? If you don't hate your father and mother, go back home. If you don't hate your wife and your own children, then don't bother about being my disciples." No wonder they quit, no wonder they went back home. "That's too high a price," they said, and that's exactly what he said, "It's going to cost you drastically to be my disciple." Total commitment is required, and cheap discipleship is not allowed.

Jesus asked if the salt has lost its salt, what do you do with it? You throw it out, it has lost its integrity. Salt has become non-salt. The rich young ruler came, and Jesus loved him. Don't forget that, love is back of this. And He said, "There is just one big problem with you, friend. You love money too much, and

you've got to get rid of that and have integrity, because you can't serve God and mammon." This young man said, "That's too expensive. I'm sorry, Lord." And Jesus let him go! Remember that, he let him go! He didn't say, "We'll work something out that is less expensive and more comfortable for you." Maybe the apostles thought, "Lord, don't let a good man like that go away. Think of all the good he can do for the kingdom." Do we maintain the same high standards of discipleship, or for the sake of numbers or popularity do we forfeit our integrity?

Modern examples

Consider an actual case history of the integrity of a man that I admire. I admire Roland Allen because he went back to the Bible. I learned a great deal from his writings when I was a missionary in Jamaica. Then I came across this biographical note: In 1907, November 25, Roland Allen, a former missionary, had a comfortable position with a church in London. Allen took Jesus seriously. That's costly, but he did take Him seriously. He saw all kinds of people in his church building going through ceremonies of marriage and baptism, and it bothered him. Finally, one Lord's Day he said from the pulpit, It is a " . . . strange and painful sight of men and women who habitually neglect their religious duties or who openly deny the truth of the Creeds, or who by the immorality of their lives openly defy the laws of God standing up as sponsors in a Christian Church, before a Christian minister . . . and as representatives of the church on the behalf of a newborn child solemnly professing their desire for Holy Baptism, their steadfast faith in the Creed and

their willingness to obey God's holy will, whilst they know, and everyone in the church knows, that they themselves neither do nor intend to do, any of these things. . . . No one can justify these things. They undermine the fundamental principle that the Church stands for morality of life. . . . I cannot satisfy my conscience, by exhorting people to refrain from doing what is wrong, and then in the last resort, if they will not listen to me, giving way to them. I've done that, I fear, too often. . . . Now I am clear: I cannot and I will not do these things any longer. . . . I have resigned" (Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, pp. 193-195).

Did you ever hear of anything like that? That's one of the few cases that I ever heard of a man acting like that. Why, the poor preacher must have been crazy. How was he going to live? Some brethren in the south have had a parallel crisis put to them: uphold racism or stand for the gospel. Some men have surrendered to keep their jobs. Others have said, "I will resign before I will destroy the integrity of the gospel. Jesus died for *all*." It's a tough thing to make these decisions and suffer for them, but you may be in that position some time. Build now your integrity; never surrender it. Walk in the Lord in His strength and the consciousness that He is in charge of your life, that you love Christ without compromise in this chaotic and corrupt culture in which we live.

Isn't the scripture very clear that integrity is required in every congregation of God's people? If there is no integrity there, then it is no congregation of Christ. If there is no strict following of the Word, but denial and neglect, then we're in serious trouble. Brother Pink, one of my

students in Jamaica, went to England and became a member of a congregation, formerly large, now about 50 members. He worked with them, and after a time they said, "We're so small we had better join up with other churches, and we'll surrender this matter of immersion because it's not all that important. After all, baptism is baptism." Pink said that when the vote was taken, he and an elder's wife were the only two who voted no, and all the rest of the members voted out immersion as a requirement. That's a loss of integrity, and you can write over that congregation "Ichabod — the glory has departed" (I Sam. 4:21). There's nothing more there to build upon.

Restore integrity

I am convinced that we who claim to be restoring Biblical Christianity have lost much integrity, like Roland Allen saw in the Church of England. We are moving in the same direction in many, many areas. We have cheap church membership. You don't have to do anything; even worse, you don't have to *be* anything. There's no requirement of discipleship (cf. Dallas Willard, "Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?" *Christianity Today*, 10/10/80). There's little warning that you must lose your life for Jesus and surrender everything to the Lord. We don't talk the gospel truth. We pussyfoot around and tell people that we have wonderful dinners in our church, a great choir, a glorious time, and are one big happy family (maybe none of this is really true). Let's hope these by-products are there; but we must tell the truth, "Friend, are you willing to repent of your sins, confess that you need Jesus and turn your life over to Him as *Lord* completely, twenty-

four hours a day every day?"

I think of Ananias and Sapphira! They lost their integrity. They started fooling with God; they tried to lie to the Holy Spirit. You know what happened. God said, "I'm not going to stand for that. You're either mine and totally dedicated or you're not." It's a serious business being a Christian. It's tough and it's hard, and you're finding that out; and my exhortation is to put that missing ingredient, that ingredient of *integrity*, in your life. Live by the highest spiritual example of Christ and faithfulness to Him, and live so

that you don't have to be afraid someone's going to tell on you, or that you're going to be exposed as one who has manipulated people or watered down the gospel. Most of all, determine not to be ashamed before the Lord Jesus Christ in that day when He might say, "I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity." I plead for faith, love, prayer, and powerful preaching of the Word in our congregations; but above all I am pleading for the restoration of the missing *ingredient* of integrity in our lives and in our congregations.

Comments on An Open Letter

HOY LEDBETTER

I was pleased to see in a recent issue of the *Firm Foundation* (1/19/82) "An Open Letter to Guy N. Woods and Reuel Lemmons," in which Fanning Yater Tant urged that he and the other two veterans make a determined effort to narrow the gap that has developed among the Lord's people during the past thirty or forty years. Tant, as you will recall, was one of the leading debaters in the "institutional controversy," which had to do with the legitimacy of contributing from the church treasury to orphan homes, Christian colleges, and other such projects.

The irenic spirit displayed in Tant's letter is very commendable. He proposes that, instead of trying to place blame for the alienation that has occurred, "we focus on the future rather than on the past." He wants "to overcome the suspicion and undo the bitterness" which has

resulted from sharp controversies. And he believes a way can be found for those who strongly differ on the institutional question (on that question at least) to work together and love and fellowship one another in the same congregation.

In concluding his letter he assures Woods and Lemmons "of my continuing friendship, my warm personal regards, and my fervent prayer that we may work together, as brethren in Christ, to promote unity and good-will among all who would follow our Lord." And I am quite sure that if this tone had prevailed during the past twenty-five years, we would be enjoying a much more extensive fellowship today.

Tant's friendly spirit beckons for a correspondingly friendly attentiveness to his practical suggestion as to how brethren who differ on the institutional question can work together within the same congrega-

tion. He calls for a revival of the "box-in-the-vestibule" approach which he put forth a quarter of a century ago. That is, a box would be placed in the vestibule of the church building into which contribution envelopes earmarked for special projects could be placed, and then, at regular intervals, the box would be opened and the envelopes would be sent to the designated projects, as Tant says, "in the name of 'Friends' and NOT IN THE NAME OF THE CHURCH."

Although it is my opinion that this institutional controversy arose over one fundamental error — the notion that the individual may be separated from the church, and that the members can do one thing while "the church" does something else — that is not, and must not become, the issue here. Both Scripture and history expose the folly of trying to resolve questions of fellowship on the basis of who is right and who is wrong, and Tant does not suggest that approach in his letter.

Romans 14 applied

But let us think of his proposal in the light of what Paul had to say about brethren who differ in Romans 14.

First of all, Paul rules out engaging in debate over the weak brother's opinions as a condition of accepting him. Brethren who feel called upon to straighten each other out will always live in chaos. Those of us who are "pro" must accept our brethren who are "anti" as those whom their Master will sustain, and not merely as subjects for quick conversion.

Next, we must have the courage to make our own a principle that was fundamental with Paul: "Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." With regard to the manner

in which the saints administer their funds, each one must arrive at his own firm conviction and live by that conviction, dedicating his life to the Lord. His practice must be determined by what he believes the Lord wants him to do, and not by what his (perhaps more liberated) brother thinks he should do, and it is his duty as one who belongs to the Lord to see to it that nobody interferes with that working out of faith.

Furthermore, there is to be no judging and no regarding with contempt. It is hard to resist the temptation to pass judgment on those who are practicing things that we believe are wrong. And it is also easy for us to view with contempt those who are restricted by "foolish hangups." No matter how silly I think my brother's viewpoints may be, I must remember that it is not my judgment seat before which he will stand, but God's.

Also, we must determine "not to put an obstacle or a stumbling-block in a brother's way." I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that no gift to a college from the church treasury is wrong in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be wrong, to him it is wrong. I must not cause him to stumble by putting irresistible pressure on him to do what I can do with a good conscience. It should be noted that I do not cause him to stumble merely by doing something of which he disapproves, for his strong disapproval may be a solid guarantee that he will not sin in that respect. But I cause him to stumble when my example entices him to do something which he believes he should not do. From that point of view, much of our controversy in the church is nothing less than seduction to sin.

Again, since the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, or main-

taining a particular monetary policy, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, we must be careful not to make a big issue out of how we use something (the church treasury) which is not formulated in Scripture. There is, in other words, something more important than the point at issue. Let's pay attention to what is the essential nature of the kingdom.

Finally, we must not only allow but insist that each member of the church live his own life of faith, for "whatever is not from faith is sin." This statement brings us back to the word "Lord" which occurs so often in this chapter. I must not allow anyone but Jesus to be my Lord, which is to say that I cannot be a conformist without denying the faith. Whatever my practice may be with regard to a given issue, it must not be determined by either the approval or the disapproval of my brethren, no matter how good they may be and no matter how noble their intentions, for the very minute I do something they want although I do not really believe it is what Jesus wants, they have acquired more control over me than he has, and, in a very real sense, they have replaced him as my master.

With regard to the institutional question, neither the "pros" nor the "antis" have a right to alter their relationship with the Lord, even for the sake of peace in the church. As Paul would say, "Happy is he who does not condemn himself in the method of administering funds he approves. But he who doubts that he should give through the church treasury is condemned if he does so, because his giving is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." Of course, the reason one doubts is that he has a nagging conviction that the Lord wants him to

do something else. He must remember: Jesus is Lord!

Today

Now, with regard to Tant's proposal, should the church adopt the "box-in-the-vestibule" method of supporting orphan homes, colleges, television programs, and other projects? That all depends. If the congregation believes that is the way it should be done, yes. If the congregation believes otherwise, no. But if the congregation is divided in its beliefs, then it must, in keeping with the principles laid down by Paul, work out something which will not deny the freedom of anyone. That may be difficult, but it is certainly not impossible, as the experience of the early church demonstrates.

The ability to work things out is simply a part of the maturity which the Lord has a right to expect of us. That does not mean that we compromise our convictions or make light of the errors of others. Bear in mind that the points of contention in the Roman church were questions of right and wrong, not just matters of judgment which could be regarded with indifference. Still they were expected to maintain unity.

Finally — and this may be the most important point for us to remember in examining Tant's proposal — let not one church try to impose upon another, as a condition of fellowship, its particular method of carrying out its mission. Surely it would be correct to say, "Let each congregation be full convinced in its own mind." And it would also be correct to say to those churches which try to intrude upon the autonomy of others, "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God."

Letters

Surgery Needed

I want to express my deep appreciation to you and the rest of the brethren who produced this latest issue of *Integrity*. It is precise, practical and pragmatic. It is precise because one does not need to read a commentary to get the point of each beloved brother who writes; it is practical because it contains workable solutions to some of our problems in this day; it is pragmatic, rather than theoretical, because it gets right to the heart of the situation which rips us apart and tells us what to do about it.

I read it carefully when it came, then went back and read certain parts again, seeking to impress them on my mind for future use. The rubber knife has been used much too long and I think it is time to do radical surgery upon our opinions with the scalpel God has provided. Jesus taught "If your eye offends you pluck it out." He said "If your hand offends you, cut it off." That leaves no room for protecting our false ideas of fellowship and unity, or hugging closer traditions which were outworn before they were adopted.

Why can we not do as Thomas Campbell suggested, reach out to our brethren "in all of the churches." Certainly he was not talking about all the "churches of Christ" because there were none when he said it. I think it is time for those who love the Savior more than the sect to begin to demonstrate the fact. Association is the first rung in the strategy of the ladder climbing back toward unity. Too long have we absented ourselves from the meetings where our contribution can be used to the glory of God and the information of our friends. Thanks again. Keep writing. And keep prodding us with God's switchblade.

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE
Saint Louis, Missouri

Grace and Unity

I just want you to know how much I appreciate *Integrity*. Through reading your publication and *Restoration Review* I am growing in spiritual knowledge and at least learning how to apply that knowledge to my

Christian life. I am constantly thrilled and excited when I finally understand what God's revelation means — to me!

In fact, some of these thoughts and ideas need to be spread around a bit. I find that most people are not familiar with *Integrity* or *Restoration Review*. They read *Firm Foundation* or *Gospel Advocate*; some read a really strange "off the wall" publication specializing in yellow journalism, which does as much good as reading *True Confessions*.

On Thursday nites, I have a Bible study at my home and we have been studying and trying to share some of these truths which are so exciting to us, with other members of our various congregations. Realizing that we cannot dump everything on some people all at once, we just try to drop a thought or an idea here and there. These new insights into God's revelation are just too good to keep to ourselves. Some of us have been spiritually undernourished for a long time — really didn't realize we were starving — but still, for some reason, we kept searching without knowing exactly what we craved. I suppose this sounds a bit strange. It's possibly hard for a person as knowledgeable as yourself and your staff to realize that there are people (like myself) who didn't connect the grace of God with Christian unity until after reading Joseph F. Jones' article (Sep/Oct. 1981). I thought: How could I have missed such an important truth? How can a person be a Christian for several years and still be so ignorant? I suppose it is from allowing myself to be a "spoon-fed" Christian for so long.

The approach to your subject matter is always reasonable and, I believe, objective. I like the way you use the Scripture — responsibly. Thanks for your help. We will continue to study and to pray for the good things that surely will come from the reciprocal sharing of truth with our unchurched friends and neighbors and our brethren!

JANET R. SLINKARD
Vandalia, Ohio

Encouraged Encourager

Thanks so much for giving yourselves to the task of teaching, encouraging, inspiring those in the body of Jesus Christ who have been so pressed down and discouraged by what has become bondage over the years.

We are encouraged by your writings and pass them along to others who also are built up in their spirits because of your dedication.

GENE AND PHYLENE PRESLEY
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