

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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answer was an obvious "Yes."

But his teaching was also heard by another group, and their response was very different. There is no reason to believe that they understood the message any more deeply than anyone else. In all probability they were just as confused and surprised. But their attitude was vastly different. For while many found Jesus' words to be offensive, and therefore, left him, Peter spoke for the twelve and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." Yes, two different groups could dip from the same well, and one could find the water to be fresh and sweet, while the other found it to be bitter. One group heard words of life, yet the other

found offensiveness.

We are not terribly different from the people who heard the strange words of Jesus nearly two thousand years ago. We too are generally unprepared to receive a message that is not already familiar and comfortable. We are easily caught off guard and shocked. But if we are busy being offended by the unfamiliar, we cannot be prepared to hear the truth that does not ask our permission to exist. The challenge that faces us is to remain open to the "hard sayings" that come with the Word of God. As long as the message of God is being spoken, "hard sayings" will be heard. We can find in them either the cause for offense or the source of life itself.

July-September, 1982

Integrity

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When and What

The excuse "better than never is late" is at least as old as Chaucer, and you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "Procrastination is the thief of time." The latter statement bears the authority of long usage, and surely there is some truth in it; but there is also something to be said for Oscar Wilde's claim that punctuality, not procrastination, is the thief of time. His reason was one which many in our generation can identify with: people who are punctual waste a lot of time waiting on those who are late.

We do not like being late; and if late is better than never, it is still not good enough. This is why we are not at all happy with the fact that *Integrity* has fallen way behind schedule. The last issue was delayed several weeks by those who do the printing and mailing. We are not taking this problem lightly and are working hard to see that it is eliminated. In this connection we are planning to combine the three issues remaining for 1982 into two. We hope this one reaches you with greater speed than the last.

In this issue we are doing something we have never done before: publishing a series of poems by the same poet. Since much of the poetry that is received by religious magazines is simply not very good, we are especially pleased to have someone as talented as Elton Higgs come across our pages in "the proud full sail of his great verse," writing with both rhyme and reason. We know that as a rule some readers cannot muster the time or concentration to read poetry, but we hope that in this case the rule will be broken, for it would be a pity to miss the pleasure Higgs' poems will provide while calling attention to some great passages in the Bible. We also hope we will not let a misprint slip by and ruin a good piece of work.

We would like to have suggestions from you regarding articles you would like to read. We do not always find it possible to follow through on suggestions, but we do always take them seriously. We would also be happy for you to mark up a copy of *Integrity* with your critical comments and send it to us. Thanks for your help.

—HGL

INTEGRITY

The Only Way to Win Reflections on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

HOY LEDBETTER

Love Is Patient

Years ago an exclusionistic preacher angrily prayed for death rather than cooperate with One he knew as "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." He believed that certain people should get what they deserved, that the alien sinners should be destroyed, and that God's graciousness had exceeded the bounds of propriety. Jonah could not deny what God was, so he wanted out.

One reason the full magnitude of God's longsuffering — the prolonged restraint of his anger and the amazing readiness of his forgiveness — is difficult for us to grasp is that we confuse longsuffering with lenience and therefore reject longsuffering. His longsuffering is often too much for us to handle psychologically, for we feel (as we should) that his attitude binds us to a corresponding patience with others, and we are just not prepared to go that far, although, unlike Jonah, we may tamper with our theology to try to make God less than he is so as to justify our intolerance.

Our difficulty is illustrated in Jesus' parable (Mt. 18) in which God is pictured as a king who, meeting a plea for patience with compassion, is willing to forgive a slave who owes him millions of dollars. But the slave has no sense of forgiveness and denies a similar forbearance to a fellow slave who owes him only a few dollars. Such is God, and such are we. It is no wonder, then, that the very first thing said about love in 1 Corinthians 13 is that "love is patient"

("suffereth long," KJV).

It has always been true that "a man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression" (Pr. 19:11), but that is not because faults do not count. Remember the forgiven slave owed millions! Our sins are enormous, and therefore what we must learn to put up with in others is enormous. Among people who know God there is no room for the outbursts of anger and hasty judgments which so often tear the church apart.

Love is Kind

"If your mercy is so cruel, what do you have for justice?" Thus complained the elephant man about the protectionist policies of those who cared for him. His question would not have been out of place in many situations in the church, where hardness disguised as soundness has been applied to the troubles people get themselves into, and where there is a great need for sympathy and understanding and a yearning for saints to be friendly, warmhearted and tolerant. To many outsiders our professed concern for others is not what it pretends to be, but seems to be a manifestation of self-interest and fear.

The Bible lays great stress upon God's constant mercy and readiness to help, and he is our model in mildness. How far we should go in following him is made clear by Jesus' demand that we "do good and lend, expecting nothing in return," because God himself "is kind to the ungrateful and selfish" (Lk. 6:35). There is no room for bartering here, no swapping of strokes; the ungrateful and selfish in no way deserve our kindness but are the kind of people we tend to

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turn away from. How can we be friendly with them?

Note the effect of God's kindness: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). His kindness is not for the convenience of those who wish to do as they please, but it reverses their lives through convicting them of sin and leading them to repentance. And this is how "love is kind" can become a reality for us.

Kindness gives birth to kindness, and those who have experienced God can follow him in maintaining a friendly attitude toward those whose behavior may leave much to be desired. They can put on a "heart of kindness" (Col. 3:12) and "be kind to one another" (Eph. 4:32) because the kindness of God so provokes them. Like the old wine which has mellowed with age (Lk. 5:39 uses the usual Greek word for "kind"), they are easy to take, and in them "the kindness of God and his love for mankind" (Tit. 3:4) appear again and again in the body of Christ. Thus bearing this fruit of the Spirit, they will tell the world the truth about God.

Love Does Not Envy

William Law called it "the most ungenerous, base, and wicked passion that can enter the heart of man." In Samuel Johnson's view it "is mere unmixed and genuine evil; it pursues a hateful end by despicable means and desires not so much its own happiness as another's misery." And James said it produces "disorder and every evil practice." Such is the reputation of envy.

When Paul says "love does not envy" (or, "is not jealous"), he uses a Greek word which is elsewhere in the context rendered "earnestly desire." In fact, his word (*zeloo*) can have three different meanings. (1) When it refers to healthy desire, it can indicate "zeal." (2) When desire is coupled with resentment, the

result is "envy." And (3) when desire is mingled with fear, "jealousy" ensues. How the word should be translated in a given passage must be determined by the context. Since both "envy" and "jealousy" would be appropriate in 1 Corinthians 13:4, the common versions are about equally divided between them, and we would do well to consider the effect of each on the life of the community of believers.

Envy, which is unhappiness at another's good fortune, focuses on one's competitor and invariably tries to bring him down. An extreme example of this attitude is what the patriarchs did to their brother Joseph. But practically any church can point to its own horrible instances. When John Lyly said that "the greatest harm that you can do unto the envious is to do well," he explained a great deal of church trouble.

Jealousy, which is apprehensive of loss of position or affection, is incompatible with Christian love. In fact, it is truly said that there is more self-love than love in jealousy. Its destructive potential can be seen on every page of human history. "Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy?" (Prov. 27:4). Not even the virtuous Desdemona could escape the murderous jealousy of Shakespeare's Othello, which the devilish Iago could provoke with such frightening ease because he knew that "trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ." Innocence is no defense against such villains; they require no cause to be jealous, for "they are not ever jealous for the cause, but jealous for they are jealous."

True love eradicates jealousy, except in the sense in which God can be called jealous. Whether the term denotes what is good or bad may be determined by the prepositions with which it is used. As N.H. Snaith has pointed out, "It is good to be 'jealous for' somebody or something; it is bad to be

jealous of' somebody.

Love Does Not Boast

"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons." In writing that line Emerson reflected the fact that there is something about the braggart which arouses suspicion. No wonder. His is a self-centered attitude which is incompatible with the gospel, including its ethics.

Braggarts are out of place in the church, even those whose boasting is not entirely without basis. A preacher who brags about his scholastic attainments will probably not be suspected of having washed the saints' feet, unless, of course, that is a point of pride with him. Could it be that when we as churches "rejoice in the Lord" over victories won, we are actually boasting of our own attainments? When we brag on our children, are we really extolling an extension of ourselves?

Sometimes we bring our bragging in the back door. "He who discommendeth others obliquely commendeth himself." This was an aspect of the Pharisee's approach, who bragged while the publican prayed.

Bragging evidently was an element in the problems of fellowship between the "weak" and "strong" in the early church, which called for the corrective, "Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:26). Whether we brag about ourselves or belittle our brothers, we are denying what we are supposed to be. Paul put it bluntly: "love does not boast" (literally, "behave as a wind-bag").

Sometimes we are more wrapped up in ourselves than we think possible. Consider this conversation between a woman and her preacher:

"I haven't committed a sin in five years."

"My, I'll bet you're proud, aren't you?"

"I sure am."

Love Is Not Arrogant

"He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals," said Franklin, but he would not deny that pride actually sets off the greatest of all rivalries, pitting man against God himself. Pride shoves God aside and places man at the center of life, which is why Whichcote said, "A proud man hath no god."

While boasting and arrogance are both expressions of self-centered pride, arrogance receives special attention in the Corinthian correspondence, being tied to sectarianism in which one would "become arrogant in behalf of one against the other" (4:6), and some had set themselves in opposition to Paul (4:18-19). They had even become arrogant in regard to the scandal of a man having his father's wife (5:2). Like the partisan in the Pastorals, who "is conceited and understands nothing," the Corinthian heretics, without knowing as they ought to know, took pride in their knowledge, and Paul had to remind them, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (8:1). The RSV is very good: "'Knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up."

These people, overly convinced of their own importance, had lost the basis of fellowship, thinking that "having the truth" made them right and gave them license to depreciate others. As is often the case with those who are smug about their possession of truth, when they were most certain and arrogant they were most mistaken. Job would have said of them, "Truly then you are the people, and with you wisdom will die!" But they did not know what they needed to know, in particular how that those who had not yet been intellectually liberated from idolatry were nonetheless brothers in Christ, even though they were in error.

The arrogant person who, with one eye on self and the other on his poor ignorant weak brother and none on God,

boasts of having the truth demonstrates that he is "inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18) and that he is really not in touch with the head of the body. Otherwise he would possess love which "does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance."

Love Is Not Rude

Most of us have had no experience in church which will qualify us to identify with Paul's distress when he refused to allow that what the Corinthians ate when they came together was really "a Lord's supper." The rude behavior of those who grabbed and gobbled without waiting for their brothers and sisters (possibly because they were in too much of a hurry to get into that phase of the worship in which spiritual gifts were abused), and who actually became intoxicated while others remained hungry, would by itself be enough to provoke the apostle's assertion that "love is not rude."

This rule would be well applied in a church like Corinth, where strong schismatic tendencies would guarantee that some could not disagree without being disagreeable. Of course, there were other and more complex questions about decorum, one of which involved the man (in 7:36) who aroused his and his fiancée's passions and then thought he was acting unbecomingly toward her by not getting married.

Our manners today could stand some polishing. We have all heard a few nasty arguments. We have heard some uncouth talk even in the pulpit, and I recall walking out on one preacher because of intolerable discourtesy. Excessive bluntness is defended as a virtue by some people; like the adulteress who eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done no wrong," they deny any guilt in running over others in an almost brutal way and will excuse their incivility by saying, "That's just the way I am. You should learn to accept me the way I am."

An explosive reaction to such mean-

ness might be expected, for "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pr. 15:1). As kindness begets kindness, rudeness begets rudeness. But love never forgets to show courtesy, tact, and politeness in all circumstances.

Love Does Not Insist on Its Own Way

When Paul wanted to send someone to check on the Philippians, he could find none better than Timothy, who, he said, "will genuinely be concerned for your welfare," and who was distinguished from others who "all seek their own interests" (Phil 2:21). Timothy's selflessness would stand out in some churches today, who need to hear what Paul told the Corinthians: "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor" (1 Cor. 10:24).

This directive is part of the discussion regarding eating meat offered to idols, and we are fortunate that out of that issue has come to us a warning and an example to the effect that we must not be concerned chiefly or only with ourselves, without regard for the well-being of others. If severe restrictions were placed on the prophets and other gifted people in the early church, then surely we should be prepared to give up some things, even good things to which we feel we are entitled, for the sake of others.

To "strive for one's own advantage" is not even good paganism. It surely can be no principle of conduct in the service of Him who gave himself for us all.

Love Is Not Irritable

Not long ago, when the members of a certain church met to consider the appointment of some prospective elders, a courageous brother sought to disqualify one of the candidates because he was quick-tempered. The prospect promptly demonstrated his anger "that anyone would say such a thing" about him, and the critic rested his case. Test yourself:

what should have been the church's next step?

There is a beautiful thought in the older versions of Hebrews 4:15: Jesus can be "touched" with the feeling of our infirmities. This verse invariably comes to mind when I read that "love is not touchy" (1 Cor. 13:5, Phillips). It is one thing to be touched; it is quite another to be touchy, i.e., apt to take offense with very slight cause.

We have seen churches utterly demoralized by people who were easily annoyed, with whom there could be no honest discussion of differences, who usually got their way because others were afraid of offending them, and who much too often flared up at the most innocuous words and deeds. We all need to consider that, although it does not rule it out entirely, the Bible provides far less justification for human anger than is commonly supposed, "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20).

Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

The resentfulness of surly sullen saints who, like Tam o'Shanter's wife, nurse their wrath to keep it warm, defies Jesus' will that we avoid a certain kind of calculation regarding deeds done or injuries suffered. He revoked the rule of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and also warned us against lending to those from whom we expect to receive as much again because a love which expects to be repaid is pagan in orientation and does not offer needed protection against the persistent human temptation to take vengeance.

If vengeance is wrong — and surely we know it is — then Christians have no valid reason to start calculating the wrongs others do to them. What will they do with such a record except use it contrary to the wishes of One who "will remember their sins no more"? If our Lord is described as "not counting their trespasses against them," then keeping

score in offenses suffered must be diabolical.

Love Does Not Rejoice at Wrong, but Rejoices in the Right

Christians, who are transformed by the renewing of their minds, experience a continuous delight in everything good. Still Paul found it necessary to remind the Corinthians that "love does not rejoice at wrong," and that reminder is of great use to us today. Let us take one example.

When one person damages another by defaming his character or exposing him to ridicule, he is guilty of libel (if the injury is done in print) or slander (if the defamation is oral). In some churches this sort of unethical behavior is simply not tolerated, but in others, where there is a fascination with the expose, it is held in honor.

Heresy hunters and scandal mongers like to sniff out wrongs for at least three possible reasons: (1) to establish their own orthodoxy by coming down hard on things they are supposed to be against and by drawing attention away from their own shortcomings, (2) for the sheer pleasure they derive from criticizing others, and/or (3) to undergird their own sense of superiority.

When we enjoy the wrongs of others because we profit from them, in which case the temptation to exaggerate is severe, there is a serious deficiency in our love. And if we have that problem, we are hardly in a position to throw stones at someone else.

Love Bears All Things

If the original verb in this clause means "bear" or "endure" (the usual translations), it is hard to see how it is to be distinguished from the terms with which the description of love begins ("patient") and ends ("endures"). The *New International Version*, "always protects," is very close to the original, for the Greek word (*stego*) commonly means

“cover, pass over in silence, keep confidential,” so perhaps the meaning here is that love “throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person” (Arndt-Gingrich).

This alternative is supported by a passage in the Septuagint in which the same Greek word is used: “Do not consult with a fool, for he will not be able to keep a secret” (Sir. 8:17, RSV). And “keep confidential” commends itself because dragging out into the open the faults and mistakes of others is one of the most common violations of the Christian family spirit. Love covers sins; it conceals rather than exposes them.

Various professions recognize the extreme importance of maintaining confidentiality, and Christians should care that severe damage may result from failure to maintain silence in some instances. This is true even in cases where there are good arguments to be made for someone else’s right to know, and it is beyond question when the only justification for talking is merely delight in gossip or a desire to damage the reputation of another or a seemingly innocent solicitude for “the good of the church.”

Love Believes . . . Hopes . . . Endures All Things

It is hard to resist the conclusion that the last three characteristics of love

constitute a single attitude. This is Bultmann’s opinion, which is consistent with his view that hope (the middle term here) involves three elements which cannot be isolated from each other: trust (faith), expectation (what we usually mean by hope), and patient waiting (endurance). In substance this means that the one who loves will maintain an unconquerable confidence with regard to his fellows.

The point is not that lovers are gullible or ignore reality, but that unhappy experiences will not cause one to lose his ability to trust others. Love does not look for bad in others but gives them the benefit of the doubt. It has the sort of confidence that Paul repeatedly professed to have in the Corinthians (especially in the second epistle), even though they caused him so much grief. And it will wait for people to learn by experience, to overcome mistakes, and to prove themselves worthier than cynics will allow. Love never loses faith, never quits hoping, and never gives up. “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.”

Plummer stated it well: “When Love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeatedly disappointed, it still courageously waits.”

The Holiness of God

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INTRODUCTION

Isaiah represents all scripture by centering on a basic conflict between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of Israel. What epitomizes his message (1:2-

31) characterizes revelation through all God’s prophets, the scripture, and the incarnation. Individual events, specific commands, and general teachings center around this conflict like petals on a daisy; they form the components of redemptive history. Since a holy God created man for fellowship, his love impelled him to establish a long-range

program by which the estrangement caused by sin could be overcome.

In preparation for the sending of his own Son, God called Abraham and developed a nation that was to become a preliminary light of holiness to the other nations. In due time the Jewish Messiah came, and the primary witness for righteousness through him went out to all men beginning at the capital of Israel. The good news of reconciliation means that through Christ there has been established in historic reality the means by which the conflict between human sinfulness and divine holiness can be overcome.

FACT OF GOD’S HOLINESS

Consistency

More than any other book Isaiah emphasizes the holiness of Yahweh, God of Israel. In addition to related expressions, the distinct title “The Holy One of Israel” occurs some twenty-five times (1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14). Although the great prophet of the Southern Kingdom may be credited with popularizing the designation for Yahweh, the characteristic itself was affirmed of the Lord from the earliest times. Abraham interceded for Lot with the question, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Elihu vindicated the justice of God when he said to Job, “Far be it from God that he should do any wickedness and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity” (Job. 34:10; cp. 34:12). Moses said of him, “All his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity; he is just and right” (Deut. 32:4). The terminology varies, but the message remains the same: Yahweh is ethical deity.

The stress on the holiness of Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures contrasted him with deities of surrounding nations.

They were gods of power rather than gods of principle. Their behavior did not rise above the depraved actions of those who conceived them; even in their worship appeared the lowest forms of debauchery and human degradation. Men feared them because of their might and served them for fear and favor. Such gods were guided by whim instead of values. Saying that God is a God of principle, not just a God of power, means that he conducts himself by values instead of drives. God is a spirit, who does not possess the human vices based on flesh.

Selflessness

In contrast to the carnal character of pagan deities, Yahweh is a selfless God. Not only is he “wholly other” from sinful man, but he is wholly for man. Whereas holiness describes his self-consistency, love describes the manner of his self-consistency — the interpersonal character of his holiness.

CRITERIA FOR GOD’S HOLINESS

Positively speaking

In logical sequence the criteria for divine holiness are God’s (a) *nature*, his (b) *purposes*, and his (c) *promises*. Out of the nature of God arise his purposes, and from his purposes arise his promises. Relative to various amounts of this total truth cluster, scripture speaks of God’s holiness. He is unable, for example, to “deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13); he operates by principles internal to himself. He cannot “lie” (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Num. 23:19); his word is his bond. Whatever God freely promises can always be believed because God can be trusted to be himself and to act consistently with his nature, purposes, and promises.

Negatively speaking

If the foregoing facts hold true, several erroneous ideas may be set aside,

including the notion that (1) *there are no criteria for his holiness* because God is sovereign. Sovereignty does not excuse inconsistency or capriciousness because sovereignty only describes his lack of *external controls*. Unlike ancient gods controlled by the Fates, Yahweh embodies the highest level of authority and power; but he subjects himself to his own *internal controls* in not denying himself or lying.

Another false conception takes it that (2) *his holiness is subject to external abstract rules*. Although sovereignty does not eliminate criteria for evaluation, it does eliminate external ones. Needless to say the principles we hold up in measurement of him come not from us but from his own self-determined patterns of conduct revealed in scripture. We have no authority or power to enforce them and no right to criticize him on the basis of them since we are ignorant of what informs his total operation. Nevertheless we recognize them in him. His word is his bond, but it is *his* word that is his bond. Any evaluating we may do is for being encouraged to trust him for ourselves and to commend him to other people. Neither freedom nor pattern creates any difficulty for divine action, for God freely patterns himself and is true to his principled freedom.

We also must not suppose that (3) *his holiness allows for self-centeredness*. God's righteousness does not exist separate from other attributes, especially not apart from love, which draws attention to the interpersonal dimension, sphere, scope, and basis of divine activity. Since salvation incorporates both God and man, holiness in salvation means consistency with love. Love gives of itself out of concern for the needs of others; consequently, God's holiness involves consistency within the qualification that love for others makes on abstract principles and personal decisions. Any decision or requirement takes into consideration

man's nature and purpose. Because God's character is loving holiness, he does not self-centeredly make requirements without regard for man's need, condition, or capacity. God's consistency includes his concern for us.

Right and wrong, good and evil derive from purpose. The purpose in creating man, Paul says, was "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). Whether creation for his own glory is self-centeredness depends on how the glory comes from creation. The key point is that God made man "to the praise of the glory of his *grace*." Grace derives from love so that glory results from God's first giving himself. God did for man first (1 Jn. 4:19b); as a result of his doing for the creature, the creature responds to God in love (1 Jn. 4:19a), which glorifies him. The heavenly Father enjoys seeing men take his gifts and derive joy and abundance from them. In that respect he is like an earthly father who enjoys seeing a grateful son delighted by his present. God is glorified when a man properly uses his gifts; his honor comes indirectly from the free response of love in those first loved by him.

By implication we set aside any notion of divine dependence on man. God, for example, did not make man because he was "lonely" in a "needing" sense. Paul describes the God of his fathers by saying he was not "served by human hands as if he needed anything since he gives to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25). Men's sacrifices do not feed him; men's praises do not feed his ego; their presence does not keep him from feeling useless. Loosely speaking, God created man from something of the reason parents want children — as offspring in their likeness on whom they can bestow love, and with something of the same results — the implicit limitation love for offspring puts on parental freedom.

Scripture also does not allow the idea that (4) *holiness excludes love*. While ancient philosophers argued for the apathy of the gods, Christianity has always taught that the Holy One of Israel loves his people. Apathy was defended because being able to appeal to God's "emotions" would afford a certain amount of control over him who was supposed to be sovereign. Being able to affect God is not, however, to control him.

Another perversion of biblical holiness in God occurs when (5) *holiness is allowed to stand parallel to love* rather than in sequence with it in salvation. God does not extend love to some and holiness to others. "Distinguishing love" does not pass over some in the saving of others. Men do come into their lost state because of their own sins so that from the standpoint of sheer justice no charge could be brought against God for unconditionally selecting a remnant for salvation. Consequently, anything God might do to avert man's chosen destiny would be an act of grace that goes beyond the call of justice.

Although nothing can be criticized in regard to justice in the above reconstruction, we question whether love is there in the sense scripture represents God as having it. An alternative formulation of love and holiness puts love first. From love comes the salvation possibility. If men refuse salvation provided by love, justice then comes about in the form of judgment, condemnation, and destruction. Holiness is brought to bear when love is refused, a procedure hardly able to be faulted either from the standpoint of love or holiness.

On this last perversion of the love-holiness relationship, a final comment needs to be made in anticipation of a clearer description under atonement. God's love did not override his holiness even in the process of providing the salvation possibility; in fact, holiness is stressed there. He did not abandon his requirements for ideal men or withdraw the death penalty. Instead, he provided through his Son a source of motivation to righteousness, identity for it, and hope for resurrection. In effect, he bought time for men to be transformed into the image of his Son.

Encounters with God

Poems by Elton D. Higgs

RELUCTANT TINDER

(Exodus 3:1-4:19)

God's bush I have become,
Burning but whole.
He enveloped me that day,
Refusing all refusal
As I trembling fought against the fire.
The ground of God's Presence
Numbed my shoeless feet,
And I hid my face
From the piercing flame.

No power but His
Could make a desert shrub

An oracle.
But I am not a pliant plant,
So willfully I strove
Against His kindling voice,
Soggy tinder for its spark;
Curiosity, not fervor,
Brought me to the bush.
But God has snared me now,
And will transform my life
With only bare consent
To be His fuel.
The comforts of Midian
Vanish
In a wisp of sacred smoke.

ZACCHAEUS
(Luke 10:1-10)

Little and much are merged today
Because Jesus looked at me.
I made the move and climbed the tree,
But He saw more than I;
He pierced my heart at a single glance,
Before I, perchance, might scramble
back
To earthly greed.
Driven by stunted stature,
I'd climbed above my fellows,
Just as then I clambered up
To view this wizard of renown.
No whit would I be topped
By scornful townsmen.
But only from that height
Came knowledge of my dwarfish soul.
Receive Him in my house?
Was not the door too low?
He stooped, and made me tall;
He ate, and I was filled;
He asked, and I gave all
To reach the mark He willed.

THE CROSSROAD
(Mark 10:17-22)

How could he scorn my gifts
And treat my strengths as nothing?
For a moment I might have left
It all behind and been his slave,
So ardent was his gaze;
But better judgment won the day,
And I resumed my weary way
To find Eternal Life.

I wished to hear his words
And master rigorous rules;
But can I throw away
Those very goods
By which I thought to help his cause?
And can some rash resolve
To follow him in rags
Accomplish more
Than earnest search for higher law?
Ah yes, I might have given him my
heart;

But I will stay behind
And cultivate my mind.

SON OF PERDITION

Did all the powers conspire
To make me plant that kiss?
And why did what He sowed among
the twelve
Bear bitter fruit in me alone?
I was called and sanctified
And given power to exorcise —
Even held the purse for all the rest.
He alone could see the secret fires
That burned my soul away,
And yet He left me to my course
And urged me from His presence
In the Upper Room.
My doom is His to bear as well;
This day we meet in hell
He let himself be killed,
Poured out the ointment
Meant as alms for all,
While I, at least, have
Dared to test my worth
And act my will.
Even now,
When emptiness engulfs me,
I cannot be still
Beneath the Scourge of God;
I shall die on a tree
Of my own devising.

THE PROBE

The outside eye
Is an awesome gift:
It probes and bares
What inner vision
Will not endure.
The pure in heart
See God but fitfully
In human frame
And must have those
Who, in His name,

Will pierce the cloud
Of good intentions
Which obscures
The darker core of self.

Beneath that cloud
Lies much to be explored;
But the native of the realm
Sees only holy ground,
And will not lift the veil.
Oh, how wonderful
To find new wilds
That yet must be redeemed!
God send us probing eyes
To blaze new paths
In *terra incognita*.

PLANTING ANEW

He reached within my soul
And plucked what seemed
Its purest parts,
Blossom, bud, and all;
He pruned and dug
And sowed new seed,
Enriched the worn-out soil;
My toil He seemed to scorn.

But when these plants of His
Sprang up and bore new fruit,
I saw them watered
With tears both His and mine;
And fed with blood,
Saw old and new entwine.

SARAH'S LAUGHTER
(Gen. 18:1-5; 21:1-6)

"Preposterous!" Sarah said,
And laughed.
"Dead trees don't bear fruit.
Shall I entice my lord
To lie with me tonight?
Can passion fill these shells again,
My shriveled womb be sown
With promised seed?"

Long since I ceased to joy
In such embrace,
And now one says,
As though we both were young,
That we shall breed a son.
This God we serve
Observes no sense of time,
Delays fulfillment past our prime,
And conjures life in limbs
That lean toward the grave."

She could not hide
That she had questioned God;
But He enclosed that laughter
In her womb,
And made it ripen with the child,
Till it emerged again,
Mature and full of praise
For heavenly incongruity.
She laughed with God when Isaac
came,
And wrapped her laughter in his name.

THE TEARS OF JOSEPH
(Gen 42:24; 43:30; 45:1-3)

•A cleansing, salty stream now
Flushes dust of bitter years away:
Dust of the road to Egypt,
Raised by shackled feet;
Dust of prison,
Dark with shattered hope;
Dust of rancor
Long unquenched by God's success.

The Pharaoh's man,
The master of Egypt's grain,
Finds nourishment within
As wells gush forth
To wash away the past.
Though brothers now have bowed
As youthful dreams foretold,
And could be crushed beneath his
hand,
There is no triumph in his heart.
They too have walked the road to Egypt
now,
And he must wash their souls
With God's forgiving tears.

Unity or Uniformity: A Note on "Thinking the Same Thing"

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If you demonstrate fellowship toward someone who you believe is practicing something wrong, are you approving his or her error? Often the answer given to this question is, "Yes." On this basis a Christian must restrict fellowship to those persons who agree with his or her own understanding of the truth. My question is: Is uniformity what the New Testament meant by "think the same thing"?

To *auto phronete* ("to think the same thing") or a similar phrase occurs in Rom. 12:16; 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; 4:2. Does it mean that all Christians must hold the same views?

For all to hold the same views, many must be persuaded away from their former views; but in the New Testament this process is expressed by the term *peitho*,¹ not to *auto phronete*. Scripture also finds occasion to speak of sameness, in which case the word *isos*² is used. When the New Testament speaks of several persons' agreeing on a decision, a prayer, a conspiracy, or anything of a group nature, the terms *eunoeo*,³ *sumphoneo*,⁴ or *eis to en estin*⁵ are used. When one party's viewpoint is accepted by all, Scripture uses *sumphemi*,⁶ *suntithemi*,⁷ or *sugkathatesis*.⁸ The unification of evil forces in Rev. 17:17 is expressed by the strange and dynamic term *poesai mian gnomen*.⁹

But the harmony of Christ's church is communicated by different terms: *sumpsuchoi*,¹⁰ *to en phronountes*,¹¹ *ten auten agapen echontes*,¹² *eireneuete*,¹³ *anechomenoi allelon en agapei*,¹⁴ and particularly by *to auto phronete* or *to auto eis allelous phronountes*.¹⁵ None of these terms is commonly used to denote uni-

formity and sameness. There was room in the churches of the New Testament period for outright disagreement tempered with "putting up with each other in love."¹⁶

The meaning of all these terms describing the church's harmony is closely approximated by the modern English term "unity in diversity."¹⁷ But "shall two walk together except they be agreed?"¹⁸ Certainly not. But agreement implies a subject upon which the two agree. The New Testament passages point to the subject upon which Christians agree: not organization, not complete uniformity, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Jesus Christ is Lord. This is the faith, the commitment, the subject of Christian unity and agreement. Paul puts it all together in Phil. 2:1-11, where he begins by exhorting the church to unity and harmony (*to auto phronete*, v.2) through the mutual possession of a mutual "mind" (*touto phroneite*, v. 5), namely servanthood like Christ's servanthood.¹⁹ The servanthood of Christ brought glory to God. Just so, Christian unity turns upon our own servanthood. The "same thing" which we are to "think" is, therefore, not a whole Christian system, but the church's faith and mission as it is centered on our Lord Jesus Christ.

Does fellowship imply mutual

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approval in every point? Certainly not, except in this one "mind" (*phronesis*, "insight," "intention"): Jesus Christ is Lord. As long as the clearly-taught, Scriptural reasons for withdrawal of fellowship are not transgressed,²⁰ Christians who disagree about their views, interpretation of the faith, organization, benevolence methods, theology, and even worship practices, should be able at least to coexist in some visible²¹ form of Christian fraternity, "to the glory of God the Father." The instruction "think the same thing" does not enforce uniformity: it is a call to fraternity — to Christian fellowship. □

1. "To persuade," e.g., Acts 5:40. The citations of Scripture for specific terms here and below are not intended to be complete word studies.
2. "Same," cf. Mk. 14:56, 59.
3. "To be well-disposed" toward someone, Matt. 5:25.
4. "To agree," e.g., Matt. 18:19; 20:2; Acts 5:9.
5. 2 John 5:8.

6. "To agree with someone," cf. Rom. 7:16.
7. "To consent," e.g., John 9:22; Acts 23:20.
8. "Agreement," cf. 2 Cor. 6:16.
9. "To make one purpose."
10. "Harmonious."
11. "Aspiring to the one thing."
12. "Having the same love," Phil. 2:2.
13. "To maintain peace," e.g., 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:13.
14. "Bearing with each other in love," Eph. 4:2.
15. "Aspiring together to the same thing," Rom. 12:16.
16. Eph. 4:2.
17. The rise in the West of individualism and the post-Enlightenment view of personal freedom are also bound up in this term. Christians should be aware of this fact in living out Christian freedom, in order to avoid spiritual anarchy. Christian freedom is freedom in Christ to serve, to love, to grow, to make mistakes, but not to maim and destroy another's faith; cf. Rom. 14:15.
18. Amos 3:3. However please note the reading of this verse in the RSV, which is much closer to the Hebrew than is the KJV. The Septuagint captures the interpersonal nature of this "agreement": "Shall two go the same general way unless they know each other?"
19. Phil. 2:5ff. There is a powerful group of interconnected passages on "the Servant" and the servant community: Isa. 53; 61:1-4; Luke 7:18-23; Mark 10:43-45; Acts 5:23-31; etc.
20. See the incisive study on the Scriptural grounds for excommunication by F.L. Lemley, "On Withdrawing Fellowship," *Integrity* II (April, 1971), 171-174.
21. The two-millennia debate over the visibility of the one church of Jesus Christ must somehow stand under the judgment of John 17:23. Intramural hostilities within Christianity severely limit our usefulness as proclaimers of the gospel of reconciliation.

For Life or Offense

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Isn't it odd the way two people can hear the same thing, yet get very different meaning out of it? It never ceases to amaze me how differently some people can understand a sermon. Occasionally, as I talk to someone about a sermon I have a feeling that he probably heard a fine message, but it wasn't the one that I thought I preached. But I do know that the same sermon, or conversation for that matter, can evoke excitement, boredom or resentment, depending upon who is listening to it, and how they are listening to it.

This was certainly true of Jesus' preaching. He didn't always make everything crystal clear. In his message there was always a disturbing element even when his words offered encouragement. So naturally he received different responses from among those who heard

him. This is particularly evident in the gospel of John when he told the people that to be his disciples they must eat his body and drink his blood. The teaching was so unusual that shock was the natural reaction. But beyond the shock the people responded in two distinctive ways: by being offended or by remaining open.

It is terribly difficult to remain open and responsive when we are confronted by something so unusual that it doesn't fit our past experience. We want to pull back. And that is exactly what many of Jesus' disciples did. They withdrew from him and no longer followed. His words made him sound like either a pagan mystery monger or an advocate of ritual cannibalism. He sensed they were disturbed by his message and so he asked, "Do you take offense at this?" The