

# Integrity

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INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be 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.

## **The Uniqueness of the Church**

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characteristic of our restorationist tradition, and assigned them nothing less than divine authority.

The unity which Jesus desires for His church is indeed unique among all the personal relationships on earth. The apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 2 how through the blood of his cross Christ has fashioned together in one body both Jew and Greek, has removed the hostility between these ancient antagonists, and reconciled them in peace! And this same unity is the work and will of God today in the Body; and our unique function is to keep that "unity which the Spirit gives in the bond of peace." No other body of human beings can claim such a unique kind of unity. New stirrings within our Church

of Christ-Christian restorationist churches are witnessing to a renewed effort to take Jesus' prayer seriously, and we are indebted to Robert Palmer for his informative article giving us an up-date on these new efforts.

The Integrity Board is deeply gratified by our readers' response again this year in their prayers, gifts, and words of encouragement. Some of these responses are included in this issue while understandably space limitations preclude many of the insightful observations which our readers have offered.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman  
*Integrity* Editorial Board

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### The Uniqueness of the Church

In formal usage *unique* means "having no like or equal," and therefore alone in comparison with others. In informal usage it may mean "rare" or "unusual," and therefore could be compared with such terms as "more" or "most," or modified by very or rather. With the focus in this issue of *Integrity* on "Body Life and the Church" it is our intent to demonstrate the actual uniqueness of the church of the living God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit of God. For in the light of Biblical teaching the church is truly unique.

In her article on "The Vital Connection" Laquita Higgs launches this whole idea of the church's uniqueness. The church is the Body of Christ, with the risen, living Lord as its Head. No other entity on earth can claim such a unique relationship with Jesus Christ, as Dr. Higgs affirms. How we need to realize the awesomeness and potential of this connection. He is truly Lord of the church. His sovereign will rules in the Body.

The church, the Body of Christ, is unique in its mission and ministry. Dean Thoroman discusses one aspect of the church's mission to "build up" or edify the Body. "Let all things be done unto edification," urges the apostle; and undergirding this mission of self-building-up is the dynamic of mutual love for all the members because God has loved us. No selfish personal aspiring to attain ambitious carnal ends; never, in the Body of Christ. It is the genuine well-being of each member which motivates and determines Body life; and such unselfishness is indeed unique in the world of interpersonal relationships — at least, this is God's perspective on life in the Body, although in implementation we may fail grievously at times.

Hoy Ledbetter, esteemed editorial advisor, has lived up to what we have come to expect in his writings with an article on "Problems With Uniqueness." Contrasted with the Biblical emphasis on the uniqueness of the church as the People of God, called and claimed of God in the redemptive blood of Jesus, and therefore unique in this relationship, has been our obsession with differentness! The church is unique because of its special character as the chosen and redeemed of God; but we have in human wisdom and self-righteous arrogance assumed to single out given beliefs (interpretations) and practices

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## The Vital Connection

LAQUITA M. HIGGS  
Dearborn, Michigan

My mother's preparation for Sunday dinner is one of my memories from growing up on a farm in Texas. On Saturday Mother would catch a chicken, hold its legs in her left hand, and lay the chicken's neck on a log. With the hatchet in her right hand, she would sever the head from the chicken in one swift chop. My interest did not lie in her efficiency, however; it was the aftermath which fascinated me. That chicken's headless body would aimlessly flop all over the yard, scattering blood in its path and stirring up quite a commotion. I even had to jump out of its way sometimes. Then it would finally be still and die a proper death.

The analogy to a chicken is somewhat crude, but some congregations appear to be headless in their aimless and unfruitful activity. They might even manage to stir up a commotion, but without firm connection to its head, a congregation cannot truly be alive and productive. Paul used a rich analogy when he likened the church to the human body. Simply put, Paul's analogy states that the head of the church is Christ and that we are the many members of the body of Christ. In this article, we shall consider the concept of Christ as head of the church and suggest some ways for making sure that the body maintains the connection to the head, so that we are not aimlessly flopping about like that headless chicken.

### The Church as the Body

The analogy of the church to the human body is only one of a number of terms that are used in describing the church, such as the bride, the temple of the living God, and the family. These different ways of describing the church teach us different things about it. For example, the church described as a bride makes us consider the process of cleansing and purification by which the church is made ready for Christ. The imagery of the temple emphasizes that we are the dwelling of God. The concept of the church

as family teaches us of the care and concern that we must have for one another.

Paul particularly liked the imagery of the church as body, using it more frequently than any other term when discussing the church. Through that analogy, he wrote about the importance of each member, about the care of members for each other, and about the unity of the body and its growth by the activity of each part, lessons which were effectively taught by the comparison with the human body. Above all, Paul taught about the head of that body, Christ, and he stressed that "on him the whole body depends" (Eph. 4:19). We need to consider carefully that head and our relationship to him, for without Christ as our head, the congregation is merely another human institution.

**Who is this head?** The head of the body is the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15); in him the "complete being of God" came to dwell (Col. 1:19). In him is the "entire fullness of God" (Eph. 1:23). God gave Christ authority over all created things; as Paul wrote, "Every power and authority in the universe is subject to him as Head" (Col. 2:10). The Lord of the universe, then, is our appointed Head. Look at this verse carefully: "He put everything in subjection beneath his feet, and appointed him as supreme head to the church, which is his body and as such holds within it the fullness of him who himself receives the entire fullness of God" (Eph. 1:22-23). Our Head, moreover, has made it possible for us to be reconciled to God: "Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross" (Col. 1:20).

These are astounding statements when the implications for us, Christ's body, are considered. We, the body, hold within ourselves the fullness of God, because we are Christ's body. Through our head and through us, his body, mankind is reconciled to God. What a privilege to be his body, and how imperative that we remain his

body by being connected to Christ, our head. The connection is vital, for Paul tells us that Christ "provides and cares" for his body (Eph. 5:29). Perhaps the best description of the function of our head is in Col. 2:19: "It is from the Head that the whole body, with all its joints and ligaments, receives its supplies, and thus knit together grows according to God's design."

There is danger, then, in failing to be connected to our spiritual head, for without that head, spiritual health and growth depart from the body. It may continue on as a human social group, but it will not be the Body of Christ. We need constantly to evaluate our connection with our head, to make sure that it is firm and sure so that we are the body. Of course, Christ is the appointed head of the body, but we can make him a mere figurehead of our congregation, not a true head, thus endangering our connection to him and putting our spiritual life in jeopardy. Following are some suggestions for maintaining our connection to Him.

## Maintaining Our Connection

*Acknowledge Jesus as our Lord.* As a congregation, we should consciously acknowledge him as our Head and Lord. We must certainly spend time getting to know him, for then we will want to spend more time in worship and praise of him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Our worship will come alive.

If he is really *our Lord* as a congregation, we will want to please him and serve him. That requires that we really listen to him in order to know what he wants of us. This listening to him may be the hardest task of all for a congregation, for it requires that we set aside human wisdom and listen together with the humble ears of the Spirit. We may not understand what he is saying to us because he may be telling us things that we don't really care to hear. He may ask us to continue in a work which doesn't seem to be achieving results, or he may ask us to stop a work that we've always done. He may ask us to be and to do that which is not comfortable; he may ask us to get out of our rut and to be open to that which is different. But if we love him and are subject to him, what he has

to say will be clear, and we will joyfully trust and obey. There are several ways that we can cultivate this attitude of "holy listening" in the body.

*Commune with him through the Word.* Through the Word we get to know our Lord. Through the Word we are taught, and we must listen to that Word, for our directions from the Lord will line up with the written Word. As a congregation, it is vital that we emphasize the Word and the responsibility of every member to be familiar with it and to take it seriously. Congregations can encourage study in the Word through planned programs of reading by all the members, and the preacher could use that reading as a basis for some of his sermons. We should spend time reading the Word aloud in our worship services, being as careful to choose good readers as we are to choose good song leaders. The public reading of the Word deserves our best efforts. The Word is living, and exposure to it will develop in us a hunger for more of the written Word, as well as hunger for the living Word, which is Christ our head.

*Commune with him through prayer.* We must be a praying church if we want to be connected to our head. We must talk to him about our plans, our ministries, our decisions, and our people. We should invite his presence and help for each worship service. I know of a church which always has prayer just before each service, with the leaders of that service, and anyone else who can come, praying together in a classroom for 15 or 20 minutes. Their worship services which follow are consistently dynamic.

We must seriously ask our head to guide in all areas of our body life, and we can *expect* to receive wisdom and guidance from him. If our prayer is real communion with him, he can use that prayer time as an opportunity to speak to our hearts and to put thoughts in our mind. How often does your congregation have a period of concentrated prayer for a particular ministry or for a decision to be made? I know of some churches who occasionally have a "half night" of prayer—sometimes even a whole night, and they are churches which have a vision for the Lord's work in their community and are growing by his design.

After much prayer for guidance concerning their finances, the elders of a large church in Oklahoma once decided that the Lord would have them abolish the annual budget for the following year, trusting the Lord to provide the financial needs of the church. Some of the congregation thought it very foolish, but the elders, confident that they were in the Lord's will, proceeded without the planned budget. The church prospered as never before. Such things happen when we pray, listen, and obey.

*Commune with him through the fellowship of others.* Our encouragement and teaching of one another builds each other up. We are to "speak the truth in love" to one another; "so shall we fully grow up into Christ." Christ can teach us through each other, for we are all one with him. "Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part, and builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). Moreover, Christ can use other members of the body to confirm his directions. As churches pray about decisions or problems and particular direction comes, there will be confirmation from within the body, as was the case in Jerusalem when the leaders of the church, though doubtful at first, became convinced that Peter was right in extending fellowship to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18).

*Commune with him through the Holy Spirit.* As Jesus was getting ready to conclude his ministry on earth, he promised his disciples that they would have the help of the Holy Spirit. Our comforter, teacher, and helper, the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth; moreover, he points us to Christ and glorifies our Head (John

16:13-14). The work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital in the body, bringing forth the traits in us which help to hold us together in unity. As a congregation, we should be alert to the Spirit's work among us, calling upon the Spirit to aid us when we have particular need of his teaching and guidance within the body. Too many of us are afraid to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit which is among us. And it is risky! The Spirit has a way of doing unpredictable things, but what is predictable is that the Spirit points in no direction but to Christ our Head, who in turn points us to God the Father.

I know a woman who sometimes does very foolish things, and I have been known to remark impatiently that she doesn't use the head that God gave her. It is likewise possible for a congregation to fail to "use" its God-given head, but it is a foolish and sad congregation which does so. Without proper direction, it will aimlessly flail about, accomplishing little. The congregation may even be trying very hard, but if it is all done with human wisdom and human strength, it is to no avail. Eventually, spiritual life will cease, just as physical life ceased in that headless chicken in the farmyard. May we, as Christ's body, keep our attention firmly fixed on maintaining a complete and full connection to our head, and thus receive all the vital nutrients, cohesion, and direction which bring us life and growth. Only then can our body attain to *his* fullness of being.

See note on page 14 for biographical reference on writer.

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# Mission of the Body — Building Itself Up

DEAN THOROMAN

Fenton, Michigan

Any congregation of Christians we have ever been part of has wanted to grow numerically and spiritually. My wife and I have participated in quite a variety of plans and programs designed to accomplish these worthy goals—often with a deep sense of frustration when the end result did not seem to justify all the investment of time and effort. In recent times it has been my good fortune to receive some new understanding about body growth through a study of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. Please read this special letter again to see if part of what follows makes sense to you.

It probably ought to be taken for granted that Jesus is the foundation of the church, but some emphasis about this is appropriate because any effort to build up the body which does not recognize where and on whom it all begins is doomed to failure. Carefully read Eph. 2:10, 20 and I Cor. 3:11, then ask once again "How important is the foundation?" I believe you will agree that it is what makes all the difference. Everything we do must be built on Jesus!

The function of the apostles in the church was to lay the proper foundation and to reveal the truth as it is in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:21). Though the original apostles have long since departed from this life, their function will continue until time shall cease. Wherever the gospel goes, the task of laying the proper foundation for the church must be done if the growth of the church is to occur. It is a mistake to believe that the disappearance of the apostles meant that their work was no longer necessary. Part of the apostolic function was, is, and shall continue to be to start new congregations. When that happens, Jesus must be the chief cornerstone in the laying of the foundation. This apostolic function is obviously in a secondary sense. There is no need for truth to be revealed beyond what the scriptures possess, but there shall always be the need to learn the truth about Jesus and

to implant this truth when new churches begin.

Another important function in the body that is expected to build itself up is that of the prophets. Essentially, a prophet is one who speaks for God, who unfolds the mind of God for the purpose of stimulating the body of God's people to action. It is the prophet's role to interpret the truth delivered through the apostles—to explain it so clearly and compellingly that hearers will not only understand but will be motivated to respond. Notice Peter's description of a prophet's task (II Pet. 1:19). Paul underscores this truth in I Cor. 14:3.

As previously noted with regard to the function of the apostles, it is an error to believe that the prophet's role has ceased. The church that grows must know the meaning of the principles of scripture and we would do well to listen to the great preachers of our day as they make the truth evident and proclaim it in such a manner that their hearers are moved by the message of God.

Paul's outline of the functions of a growing body in Eph 4:11-12 includes a third significant part to be performed, the work of an evangelist. Effective evangelists are those with a special gift of communicating the truths of the Bible in ways which are practical and meaningful to their listeners. While it is expected that all disciples of Jesus will evangelize in the general sense of the word, it should be noted the work of persons with greater ability to proclaim the good news goes beyond the mere telling of experiences leading to salvation. Theirs is to present the message of grace and love in such a way that men and women will be called to make dramatic changes which only obedience to God can effect.

The fourth necessary function of bodies which build themselves up is that of pastors and teachers. This vital job comes from within the body and is performed by those who maintain

the life of a congregation by seeing that it is properly fed, cleansed, and preserved. Words which are synonymous with pastor include bishop, shepherd, and elder. In Paul's day those who served a congregation in this capacity did so for churches in their own communities and of which they were members. Their role could not be adequately performed in any other way.

Pastors were never intended to be church bosses. Note how Peter's language (I Pet. 5:3) corresponds with Jesus' teaching as recorder by Mark (Mk. 10:42-43). The "authority" of elders lies in their good example. They should demonstrate by their own lives that obedience to the word of God is so powerful that others will be motivated to "do as they do" and not because of what they say. When pastors lose their spirituality they lose any reason to expect others to follow them. It is not their "office" which provides them with the right to rule—it is their own lives and the proper exercise of their spiritual gifts before God.

## No Room for Lording

It is imperative for growing churches to recognize the truth regarding the structure of the body. There is no basis in scripture for setting up any system in which the usual lines of authority are part of it. Whether it be one person or many, there is no room in the kingdom of Jesus for anyone lording it over the body. Jesus intended for the body to be an example of servanthood. This principle includes preachers and pastors. The degree to which the principle is ignored is the degree to which a body suffers in terms of building itself up according to God's plan. A body of elders in a congregation today ought to concern itself with how God in their midst wants to run his own church. The true authority of the church then is the Lord, not some ruling body usurping his authority.

All church leaders as well as those who follow them ought to look closely at passages such as I Thess. 5:12-13 in versions other than the King James translation. The respect which leaders deserve comes not from their position, but from their ability to persuade by knowledge

of the word and by powerful examples of obedience. Another verse which needs deeper study is Heb. 13:17. Again, the clearer meaning of the passage is that leaders are those who convince others with more than smooth speech and domineering personalities. Their leadership comes from such a personal walk with the Lord that respect is commanded rather than demanded. In simple terms, there is no automatic grant of authority with appointment to the eldership — no right to command people against their will. Pastors are leaders who have earned their office!

An objective look at churches of today in contrast to the church described by Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus makes it glaringly apparent that many changes have occurred since that epistle was written. The simple plan outlined then has been altered in so many ways that neither time nor space will allow detailing them. A few of the fatal changes will be mentioned.

Paul's idea of working in the church included the feeling and full recognition of each member as a vital part of the body — each member functioning to make the body complete — each member exercising gifts of performing ministries — each member assuming responsibility as a Christian in all walks of life. Perhaps no one will ever be able to trace how this concept was changed, but it was. Gradually, being a Christian came to mean performing certain religious acts in a building which itself came to be called a church.

At the same time there came about a gradual shifting of responsibility from the people (known as the laity) to the church leaders (known as the clergy). It is tragic that somewhere in this trend nearly everyone forgot the scriptural concept that every believer is a priest before God and that there never was intended to be a special class of believers who should perform "the ministry."

What has been said previously about the various functions of the body now needs to be looked at in terms of the overall purpose of these roles as revealed by Paul. Notice the last part of Eph. 4:12. It should be crystal clear that all Christians are "in the ministry." It should

be equally clear that when all members of a congregation accept this responsibility that the body will truly be ready to build itself up.

## Participants — Not Spectators

Part of the thrust of this article is to emphasize that far too many churches have allowed themselves to drift into or to remain in a state of nothingness by enabling great numbers of Christians to be spectators rather than participators in the greatest calling ever presented to mankind.

One of the sad consequences of this departure from scripture has been that pastors and ministers have been unequal to the task, leading to unnecessary despair and feelings of guilt wrongly placed. In some congregations this has also resulted in avoidance of leadership roles, resignations from responsibilities, and firings of paid employees because they did not produce numerical growth.

Another unhappy result of enabling the masses of church members to escape their God-given ministries has been apathy to the extreme. Any person who has conscientiously tried to get something underway will tell about the weariness of recruiting and seeing a task to its conclusion. The “faithful few” get tired and sometimes they become fewer!

Yet another effect of this unscriptural approach to growth has been that the church as a whole has not had much of an impact on a world that is crying for what God has to offer. Those who are in a position to do so must make a valiant effort to turn the matter completely around. The true ministry of the body of Christ must be taught and practiced. It is the total body which must undertake the ministry of Jesus — to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven, to bring relief to the distressed, to heal the brokenhearted, to feed and clothe the poor and needy, to bind the wounds of those who have been afflicted in any way.

## Discover and Exercise Gifts

The role of the leaders is to equip and to guide the body, applying the wisdom of each necessary member, and helping each one to

discover gifts which the Holy Spirit provides while exercising such gifts to the building up of the body and for the glory of God.

How may all members of the church be inspired to fulfill the foregoing ideals? There must be a commitment to return to the example of what the church is and what it ought to be doing. The lack of knowledge of scripture and failure to apply its teaching must be reversed. The enabling process must be stopped. Those who are in a position to teach the word of God must teach it clearly and forcefully. Each Christian must be encouraged to assume personal responsibility for learning and applying the scripture. This must be part of the teaching about becoming a Christian.

Evangelism must be encouraged wherever there are saints. Studies in homes, in places of employment, wherever one may obtain a hearing for the gospel must be as natural as being a Christian. The gathering times for the saints must be used to train those who are already Christians. Sunday school lessons and sermons must be designed to get the soldiers of Christ ready for battle! Followers of Jesus must learn how to live in the world to overcome rather than to be overcome. The leadership must not only be respected, but it must also be encouraged to seek those who will continue the work of the body — to build itself up.

The world must see Jesus at work through his body. If only a sheltered, overworked part of that body tries to accomplish this goal the world will never be won for God. It is true that our gifts are not all alike and that some possess gifts to greater degrees than others, but we must accept the truth that each member is necessary and that each member has a gift. Each gift must be used or the body is crippled and ineffective to the extent gifts are dormant or neglected.

Preachers and elders, you have a great responsibility within the body where you are a member. Seek God’s wisdom to know what that task really is. Know that you cannot do the work of others and that God does not expect you to! Lend your energies to helping others to find their work and to encouraging them to do it. Help others discover their God-given gifts and encourage them to use those gifts. You hold

an important place in God’s plan for his church’s ministry. Fulfill it!

Church members everywhere, please accept your personal responsibility before God. Do not expect anyone — paid or volunteer — to do what only you can do in fulfilling the church’s ministry. We are all ministers for God! Neglect not the gift that is in you! Ask others to help you find your gift and resolve to use it to the

## Problems with Uniqueness

HOY LEDBETTER

Atlanta, Georgia

“Brother Ledbetter. I’d like to have an office in the church building, but *the denominations* have them!” These stunning words came from an elder of the church with which I had recently begun my first full-time ministry. We were riding together, in between pastoral calls, and discussing plans for a new church building. When I made some remark about adequate office space, his reply, which carried just a hint of regret, left me with an unforgettable lesson, not only on the makeup of that particular congregation, but also on the mindset of the brotherhood of which it was a part.

One is tempted to regard this man’s statement (which may have been partly a question) as a spectacular instance of backward thinking. But we should not throw stones too hastily. Actually he was applying to the office in the church building (that was before such expedients became commonplace among his people) a test which was representative of a common way of thinking. We will do well to analyze his viewpoint because it may not be as far from our own as we imagine.

This dear brother was not against an office in the church building as such. He saw some advantages to having one, would have personally liked one, and was aware of no Biblical prohibition. But all of the reasons for, in his mind, could not stand against the one reason against: *the denominations* had them!

glory of God in the ministry of building up the body.

Dean Thoroman is a founding member of the board of Integrity; an elder and preaching minister for the church in Fenton, Michigan. High school teacher by profession, Dean and wife Del are perennial sources of Christian inspiration to countless lives.

In this generation it may be necessary to point out that by denominations he meant any fellowship of professing Christians outside our particular kind of restorationist church, including some who were very similar to us and shared our roots. The very fact that other churches had something, no matter how useful, desirable or scriptural it might be, was enough to outlaw it. We knew, of course, that the impulse to be different could lead to some strange behavior, and we had looked with mild amusement on those who dressed in outmoded clothes and preferred horse-drawn vehicles to motor cars. But we saw our peculiarities in a different light, as something to be defended. And so the over whelming issue with my brother was whether or not we could properly surrender an established symbol of differentness, for being different had become so crucial it had to be maintained even at the cost of something useful to our ministry. How do we account for that obsession?

The aforementioned brother, who was a gentle, easygoing person, had spent his life in a religious setting in which it was frequently (and vigorously) emphasized that “we are the peculiar people.” Because of that emphasis it was not unusual for other people to think of us as peculiar, but they applied the word disparagingly. We had taken an important Biblical term and made it fit our preoccupation with being

unlike anybody else.

If this phenomenon were merely one of the novelties of the past, it would hardly merit the space we are now giving to it. But the truth is that even today, when we think of ourselves as a sophisticated people, we hear a great deal of anxiety about change expressed in the concern that if certain alterations occur, we will be "no different from anyone else."

## Restoration Uniqueness versus Historic Christianity

Our past tendency to make differentness an essential characteristic of the church has caused historian Sydney Ahlstrom to describe us as a people "immured behind a Campbellian wall, going their own way without cooperation, consultation, or coordination with anyone but themselves..." (*A Religious History of the American People*, II, 295). With the possible exception of the part about the "Campbellian wall," there is nothing in the writer's reference which would offend "the peculiar people."

But Ahlstrom himself is not so sure. He goes on to say: "Most of their controversies and doctrinal questions involved points that only other Restorationists could understand." And evidently feeling that his comment might come across as an unfair exaggeration, he elaborates in a footnote: "This is not an innocent or hasty assertion... Of the nine critical issues that cause dissension within the Churches of Christ and separate them from other conservative Disciples, few if any have any place in the controversies of other Christian Churches, Catholic or Evangelical." The nine critical issues are apparently drawn from James DeForest Murch's statement in *Christians Only* (310) that "major differences have to do with proper observance of the Lord's Supper, the Sunday school, the choice of elders, colleges, missionary methods, the located ministry, choirs and special music, millennial views, and the place of women in the church."

So we have found ourselves spending much of our time engaging in arguments which our religious neighbors have no interest in, and regarding as crucial various controversies which

people who have not grown up with us simply cannot understand. But do not conclude that this fascination should not be taken seriously. It is deadly serious, and to try to sweep these matters under the rug would result in a grave psychological crisis for many of us.

## Pharisaic Need to Be Different

Perhaps you will recall that several years ago Harry Emerson Fosdick argued in his *The Man from Nazareth* that the reason the Pharisees rejected Jesus was that in their view he was breaking down the barriers that marked Jews off from all other people, barriers which they worked so hard to maintain. They were not simply quibblers over legalistic trivialities, but believed that those questions about tassels and phylacteries and washing hands and so on were vital to guarantee that the Jews would not lose their distinguishing characteristics. It was a matter of great importance to them that Jesus should appreciate the necessity of their religious and cultural customs. When he did not, when he offered no support to their efforts to remain the "peculiar people," they turned against him. They had to, given their view of differentness.

This way of looking at things was not abandoned by those Pharisees who became members of the church. Thus we read in Acts 15:5 that "certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.'" Such proponents of Jewish peculiarities were not only active in Jerusalem, but they hounded Paul in many other places and tried to frustrate his apostleship to the Gentiles.

The remedy for their vigorous exclusionism is to be found in the church's disposition of the controversy in Acts 15. They sent out a letter declaring that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials..." But these essentials did not include circumcision, nor whatever was included in observing the Law of Moses. It must have come as quite a shock to the conservative party to learn that circumcision is not to be regarded as a distinguishing mark of the church!

So we are not the first of God's people to pass through an identity crisis because of our apparent inability to maintain separatist barriers. One can almost hear those Jerusalem saints insisting, "If we start admitting uncircumcised people into the church, then we will be no different from anyone else." Or, "If we share the table with the Gentiles, we will lose our distinctiveness." The fear and anxiety behind such statements may be considerable and will call for truly Christian sensitivity.

Differentness, even when expressed in features which the Bible labels unnecessary and which other Christians find odd, may be defended. We all know that there were some differences between the Jewish and Gentile churches in the New Testament period. But - and this in the important thing - those differences were never regarded as essential marks of the church, except among those whom the Bible brands as sectarians. Paul underscored that point by insisting that "neither circumcision [a mark of some churches] nor uncircumcision [a mark of others] means anything, but faith working through love [an essential mark of all churches]."

## Differentness - Our Right to Exist

At some point in our history our focus shifted from trying to unite the Christians in the various churches to defending our right to exist as a separate denomination. Knowing deep in our hearts that if we were basically like everybody else we would have no sufficient reason to maintain a separate brotherhood to which other Christians could be converted, we began to emphasize peculiarities which, instead of separating the church from the world, separated us from other Christians who shared our conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord. Two of these distinguishing marks were the exclusion of instrumental music from worship and the practice of having the Lord's supper every Sunday and only on Sunday.

For years these distinctions received so much stress among us that some of our folks became convinced that the church could not exist without them. I have never forgotten the shock of learning that a member of my own congrega-

tion was sure that if he ever reached the conviction that we could eat the Lord's supper on Wednesday evening or have instrumental music in worship, he would quit going to church altogether. So significant were these distinctions to him that without them the Christian faith became worthless and should be abandoned. In this emphasis, rather than his position on the issues themselves, lay his error and vulnerability to disaster.

What should surprise us about this extreme view is not that it has resulted from our preaching but that it can survive in the absence of Biblical support, especially among a people who pride themselves in speaking where the Bible speaks and remaining silent where it is silent. In the letters and recorded sermons of the New Testament there is never a hint that one of these items might be an essential mark of the church. If a point of distinction is vital to the identity of the church, and if the whole Christian experience is nullified without it, then one would think that some recognition of that fact would be found in the early church. But these two issues not only fail to receive in the Bible the essential status we give them, but there is no Biblical precedent for anyone arguing for them at all. There is a real danger in basing our right to exist on such a shaky foundation.

## But Differentness is Essential

But we need to be aware that there is also a danger in giving up this emphasis on differentness. Churches which do so often find themselves confused about who they are, and the mortality rate among such is high. This is no reason to persist in sectarianism, but it does underscore the need for dealing with the problem of self-identification. This problem will rob us of motivation for evangelizing, neutralize our commitment to the local church, and ultimately deprive us of meaningful fellowship. One of our forefathers was known for his frequent warning, "Brethren, we are drifting." His refrain could well speak to the aimlessness of some today who no longer think of themselves as the peculiar people and who never seem to rise above trying to figure out who they are.

The solution to this problem could be the subject of a long article, but for the moment I would like to make two suggestions. First, each church should make an exhaustive review of the Biblical data to confirm or correct its views of what are the essential marks of the church and how its differentness should be expressed in the world today. Second, each congregation should write its own statement of faith and practice. That is not an easy thing to do, but it is necessary for a cohesive fellowship and will

provide the congregation with a basic education in theology and will enable it to turn an identity crisis into an asset.

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Hoy Ledbetter and *Integrity* are interchangeable names in the history of this journal. Until a few years ago Hoy served as the Editor-in-Chief of the paper; he now lives with his family in Atlanta, Georgia and serves the Brookvalley Church.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

W. ROBERT PALMER

Lansing, Michigan

Where have we been? For some 80 years two groups have gone their separate ways — both espousing New Testament Christianity and having a common Restoration Movement heritage. They both have crystallized into separate bodies with their own organizations, congregations and ministries — thousands of them across the land and other nations of the world, with little concern or knowledge of one another. This is too long and too tragic considering how much both have in common. Of course, I refer to what is commonly called “non-instrument” Churches of Christ on the one hand and “instrumental” independent Churches of Christ or Christian Churches on the other.

Where are we now going? This is the question we address today. During the past year-and-a-half, three Restoration Forums have been held (two on our college campuses and one in a local church building), with 50 men from each of the two groups being recruited to make a study of the agreements and disagreements existing between the two and the goal of pursuing wholesome unity the chief end.

It was like someone opening the window of John 17 and allowing the spiritual breeze of unity to refresh a people too long separated.

There were papers presented and discussions held — in the spirit of being candid, respectful

of one another, scholarly in approaching the New Testament text and open to examine the most critical areas of difference. Look at some of the subjects: “Biblical Understanding of Worship,” “Fellowship Without Compromise,” “History of our Division,” “What Hermeneutical Differences do we Have?,” etc. As the men shared and prayed together, they became more comfortable with one another and our Lord’s will for unity became more prevalent than it has for years.

But now, in a practical way, what suggestions would we submit to allow this spirit and practice to proliferate out into the thousands of communities where we exist side by side separately and thus explore our unity possibilities and give a better witness in our communities to New Testament Christianity which we embrace so fervently?

First of all, we need to begin by cultivating a deep desire for and love for unity — the kind of unity clearly taught in the New Testament. If we belong to Jesus Christ, espouse His Word and submit to His authority, we will put the unity of the faith above emotion, prejudice, party spirit, tradition, institutional loyalties and fixed human opinions. This is as pragmatic as one can get. We will be amazed at what unifying ends will result from this initial attitude. When

men and women really want unity, the outcome will be exciting and effective.

Then, too, we must erase all suspicions we have of others who embrace the same goal — we erect “plank number one in the platform of unity” when we have this kind of respect. The body of Christ has had this schism too long. We want what Christ wants — unity, not division.

Next, we had better “clean up” our language. We have talked too long about “they” and “us.” Our vocabularies have helped divide us, though unintentionally, for the most part. When speaking about New Testament churches, we usually exclude “the other group,” or we talk about the group that is “narrow or anti,” or the group that is “in error.” Sometimes we affix “names” that are not complimentary, but highly emotional and unloving.

We had better make a fresh study of Scripture in our interpersonal attitudes and language (Romans 14; Ephesians 4:1-6; I Corinthians 1:10-17, 4:1-17; Colossians 3:11-17; Galatians 6:9,10; Philippians 2:3,4; Romans 16:17-19; Romans 12:18; II Timothy 2:14-26). And, may we start by restoring that beautiful title of “brother” when we talk to and about each other. We have all confessed our faith in the Lord and been baptized into Christ — so we are in His family. God made us brothers and we should recognize it.

Now that we have talked about our attitudes and our words, let us proceed to our deeds. Here there are many things we can begin to do together which would be productive of increasing our practice of unity.

### Our Practice of Unity

Probably a good place to begin is with the preachers. If preachers, in any given area, would simply take the initiative and reach out to one another, this could be a very good start. They could meet on a one-to-one basis, get to know the other over a cup of coffee, proceed further to fraternize, pray together, study Scripture together — whatever the friendship would lead them to do and wherever their convictions would permit. This could begin in a small friendly way and then allow this to grow as the

Spirit moves them. It will take time. However, what is that compared to 80 years of division?

It would be well to work through our area preachers’ meetings. They could have joint sessions, especially in areas of important agreement. They could combine forces when encountering certain common goals, such as a chaplaincy, community evils, devious false doctrines. This happened in our area when the local sheriff refused to allow a baptistry to be brought into the jail area — he felt it wasn’t necessary even when preaching to the inmates. We got preachers from both groups to write letters explaining that there were several of us who teach baptism is essential to salvation and urged him to change his mind.

We have invited preachers from “the other group” (see, there I did it myself) to come to ours and lead us in a study in a field we know where we excel. If we pursue this course far enough, maybe we can erase the “other group” syndrome.

One of the beautiful things we have seen happen is where two men, each from a “different side of the keyboard” have become good, trusting friends. This fellowship, even in diversity, has become so sweet and supportive.

Another approach worth pursuing is that of holding joint meetings with the Elders of both groups. They could share their thoughts, their goals, their kinds of ministries. I have found that sometimes these men meet and fraternize in the work world or the social world — why not have them (along with their families) meet in some common place as a part of the Kingdom world?

Probably, the richest aspect of this kind of fellowship is to have the separate congregations plan some kind of common meeting — maybe as a beginning it could be other than Sunday. How about inviting each other to attend a revival meeting — and even participate?

We have had an interesting experience made possible by one of our diversities. Our Church of Christ brethren (just about 9 city blocks from us) believe they should not have an organ in their building. So, we have developed a cooperative effort where several of their weddings, using their own preacher, have been held in our facilities. And, a grateful spirit of

cooperation has been manifest. This is a little progress but a few years ago would have been anathema.

Here is a helpful step. Exchange literature — church papers, tracts, and books. This has produced both a new understanding and respect for one another. It is amazing how often we have failed to understand the other person because of ignorance or terminology barriers. For example, in our national forum we discovered that what one party meant by “convention” and the other meant by “lectureship” were one and the same. For years we have both been engaged in the same practice, and thought we were different, even to the point of departing from the

faith. More and more we should learn to listen to one another — openly and respectfully.

Finally, may we suggest one last practical thing to do about all this? Let us bathe this whole matter in prayer. For years we have prayed *about* unity. Now, we are beginning to pray *for* one another. Try it! It works!

Robert Palmer is minister of West Lansing Christian Church, and a leader in the unity efforts among restorationist churches. His perceptive mind and gentle spirit are being used of God to break down barriers and build up hope that God’s people might be one.

## Regretful Oversight

Many of our readers have been appreciative of our format in recent issues which has included a brief biographical note on writers at the end of each article. We regret that in the November/December 1985 issue these informational notes were omitted; and therefore, list them in this issue with the appropriate article which each writer supplied.

**Laquita M. Higgs**, “Dawning.”

**Elton D. Higgs**, “And the Word Became Flesh.” Drs. Laquita and Elton Higgs are long time board members of *Integrity*; both are professors at the University of Michigan (Dearborn); and in mid-summer, 1986, will return to England for their second sabbatical in that country.

**Diane G. H. Kilmer**, “Free to Celebrate.”

Diane Kilmer and her husband, Bruce, are devoted members of the *Integrity* Board, and frequent contributors of significant articles. Diane attended Abilene Christian University and is the mother of two small children. Diane and family live in Lansing, Michigan.

**Janis Van Horn**, “Experiencing the Death of an Unconceived Child.” Janis is a graduate of Abilene Christian University, teaches Kindergarten at Southfield Christian School,

Southfield, Michigan; and is a deeply involved member of the Troy, Michigan, Church of Christ. She and husband John are now the grateful parents of two beautiful children by adoption.

**Ivan E. Jameson**, “Not a Place But a Person.”

Ivan Jameson, long-time preacher of the Gospel, has struggled intensively for liberation from the legalism which has so frequently blighted the Christian experience of many individuals and congregations. He now preaches for a small but autonomous congregation in Austin, Texas.

**Elmer Prout**, “The Source of Christian Boldness.”

Elmer Prout graduated from Pepperdine University, and has served both in foreign and national ministries. During this past Fall, 1985, he and wife, Geneva, returned to resume their ministry in Numasu-shi, Japan.

**Gene Cowie**, “The Potter’s Wheel.”

Gene Cowie, M.S., has taught at Michigan Christian College, Lawrence Institute of Technology, and Wayne State University. He has served as an elder at Troy Church of Christ for eleven years.

Joseph F. Jones

## Readers’ Response

Dear Dr. Jones,

Thank you for another excellent issue of *Integrity* (November/December, 1985).

May I comment on Elmer Prout’s article “The Source of Christian Boldness”? I believe brother Prout’s conclusion about the power of forgiveness is true, but I do not believe it is complete. The source of Christian boldness is none other than the Holy Spirit!

The episode cited by Mr. Prout concerning the boldness of Peter is bracketed by Scripture which points this out: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them...and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:8-31 KJV)

Yes, it is essential to be swept clean by the Lord’s forgiveness, but it is also imperative to fill the void with His Holy Spirit. Jesus told of one who was cleansed of an evil spirit, but was in danger of having his vacant soul rehhabited by even worse demons because there was nothing good to take his place. (Luke 11:24-26)

Praise God for the cleansing power of forgiveness and for the life changing power of the indwelling Holy Spirit!

Yours in Christ,  
E. Dan Johnson  
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Bother Jones,

Please pass this request for address change on to the person who takes care of those matters... (Writer has returned to Japan for further missionary work...) The September/October issue of *Integrity* was sent on to Japan and reached us yesterday (Nov.6). Thanks for your editorial efforts — you and your staff are being used by the Lord to bless folks around the world.

Sincerely in Christ  
Elmer Prout  
Numazu-shi, Japan

Ed. Note: Thanks for citing the enlightening comment from Gerald Janzen’s new commentary of Job in the Interpretation Commentary Series, published by John Knox, 1985.

“I have been reading *Integrity* since 1969. I enjoy your little magazine very much and have almost a complete file of them on hand.”

Sincerely yours,  
D. W. Conley  
Big Spring, Texas

Dear Brethren:

Just wanted to write a note of appreciation and encouragement to all of you who are involved in the publication of *Integrity*. You provide a particularly important service to those of us with a Restoration heritage, and I think you are always striving to give your readers your best shot.

When I realize the price the apostles paid (most of them with their lives) to spread the Good News of the Gospel, I am amazed and overwhelmed...but they knew, and we know, that the Gospel is true and that Christ’s message of God’s love is the only hope for the world. We may not be challenged to give our very lives, but we are challenged to share the blessings we have received. So I consider it a privilege to be a part of your efforts in helping to meet the challenge of Christ when he told us to “pass the salt and turn on the light.”

May God continue to guide you and bless your ministry...and may we all remain worthy of the trust God has placed in us, because the responsibility of keeping the light of Christ shining brightly in our day is truly ours.

Your sister in Christ,  
Janet R. Slinkard  
Vandalia, Ohio