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SIMPLE TRUSTING FAITH

DON HAYMES

John Hus was burned at the stake July 6, 1415, by order of the bishops of the one catholic and apostolic church assembled in the Council of Constance. There is a story, told widely at the time, that as the flames rose higher and higher a humble peasant stepped forward bearing a small sliver of wood to add to the huge pyre. The dying Hus could not contain his admiration. "Sancta simplicitas!" he cried. "Holy simplicity!"

Such simplicity was not a property of Hus. A son of a peasant who was a son of a peasant, he became a mediaeval Amos, raging against the established order, setting the stage for Luther and the Peasant Revolt more than a century later. Among other things, Hus campaigned for the authority of scripture over tradition and a return to the faith and practice of the primitive church. But armed with the simple trusting faith of the great mass who followed orders and asked no questions, the bishops and princes destroyed him in his prime.

Holy Simplicity—simple trusting faith—cannot be underestimated. Without it, no wars could have been fought, no inquisitions

launched, no priests and preachers paid, no heretics burned, no cathedrals raised. In every age, it provides the raw materials for the Devil's masquerade as the Divine. But Holy Simplicity would accomplish nothing without the assistance of some strange allies, and chief among these allies are so-called liberal intellectuals.

Luther and Erasmus . . .

This particular thesis is admittedly provocative, but I believe it can be demonstrated from the events of history and the present time. There is perhaps no better place to begin than with the historically decisive tension between the rebellious Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, and the shrewd, vacillating scholar, Desiderius Erasmus.

Erasmus was the foremost scholar and most brilliant intellect in the Europe of his day. His critical edition of the Greek New Testament was the basic tool of the translators of the King James Version. It was the first Greek New Testament ever published in print, and if it abounded with errors in the light of today's scholarship, these errors could not be blamed on Erasmus; he did the best he could with the sources available at the time; his criticism presaged many later discoveries. He was honored and rewarded by the princes of Europe and the Church. In

March 1517, on the eve of the Reformation, the genteel Medici, Pope Leo X, released Erasmus from monastic vows he had not kept and addressed him in these terms:

Beloved son, health and apostolic benediction. The good favor of your life and character, your rare erudition and high merits, witnessed not only by the monuments of your studies, which are everywhere celebrated, but also by the general vote of the most learned men, and commended to us finally by the letters of two most illustrious princes . . . give us reason to distinguish you with special and singular favor. We have therefore willingly granted your request, being ready to declare more abundantly our affection for you when you shall either yourself minister occasion, or accident shall furnish it, deeming it right that your holy industry, assiduously exerted for the public advantage, should be encouraged to higher endeavors by adequate rewards.

Was this "beloved son" of the Pope a loyal son of Mother Church? Well, not exactly. His *Julius exclusus* had stung the previous Pope, Julius II, with bitter satire. *The Praise of Folly* and the *Colloquies* shredded the dignities of Popes and clergy, mocked the monks, taunted scholastic theologians and philosophers, and gave the lie to miracles and superstition with an eloquence far more devastating than anything managed by the Reformers. His New Testament studies repeatedly exposed to his eyes the distance between primitive Christianity and the mediaeval Church. For the Reformation, his notes on Matthew 11:30 are significant:

Truly the yoke of Christ would be sweet, and his burden light, if petty human institutions added nothing to what he himself imposed. He commanded us nothing save love for one another, and there is nothing so bitter that affection does not soften and sweeten it. Everything according to nature is easily borne, and nothing accords better with the nature of man than the philosophy of Christ, of which the sole end is to give back to fallen nature its innocence and integrity. . . . The Church added to it many things, of which some can be omitted without prejudice to the faith . . . as, for ex-

ample, all the philosophic doctrines on . . . the nature of—and distinction of persons in—the Deity. . . . What rules, what superstitions, we have about vestments! . . . How many fasts are instituted! . . . What shall we say about vows . . . about the authority of the Pope, the abuse of absolutions and dispensations? . . . Would that men were content to let Christ rule by the laws of the Gospel, and that they would no longer seek to strengthen their obscurant tyranny by human decrees!

For the few who could read them, in Latin, such writings of Erasmus were a religious Emancipation Proclamation. But Erasmus seems to have wanted only admiration, not action. He espoused the ideal of change, but could not bear the reality. In Latin, he questioned the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, and Transubstantiation; he advised the "least literal" interpretation of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament; he was, as we have seen, a devastating critic of contemporary Church practice. It was this "holy industry" that the humanist Pope Leo applauded; to the end of his life Erasmus existed on the patronage of educated Catholic royalty. He was, for a time, a privy councilor to the future Emperor Charles V, who condemned Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521. It was the strategy of Erasmus to educate powerful and influential men to gradual correction of ecclesiastical abuses. Enter Martin Luther.

Latin and Plain German . . .

By all rights they should have been allies; yet no two men were more unlike in temperament and tactics than Erasmus and Luther. Both men were Scripture scholars; by, say, 1520, both had reached nearly identical conclusions—if anything, Luther was the more orthodox of the two. But, as Luther confided to friends early in the struggle, "What Erasmus insinuates in Latin, I say in plain

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German." It was a fateful—and decisive—distinction. Erasmus wrote for the amusement and instruction of an educated, powerful elite, while Luther took his case to the people, for action.

In 1520, with papal representatives clamouring for Luther's head, Duke Frederick, Elector of Saxony, inquired of Erasmus as to what were Luther's errors. Erasmus replied: "Two: he attacked the Pope in his crown and the monks in their bellies." By taking his case to the people, Luther had transformed reform of the Church from an intellectual exercise to a direct threat to the livelihood of the people who profited from abuses of ecclesiastical power. It was a challenge that the clergy and secular authorities could not afford to ignore.

At first Erasmus defended Luther, and urged moderation to his powerful friends. But as the controversy became more heated, the sensibilities of Erasmus were offended. He had no stomach for battle, and no appetite for a popular movement. Orthodox clergy and theologians, jealous of his prestige, accused him of fomenting the Reform—of laying the egg that Luther hatched; Erasmus retorted that "the egg I laid was a hen, whereas Luther has hatched a gamecock."

In March 1519 Luther wrote to Erasmus, soliciting his friendship and support. This was the critical moment . . . and Erasmus vacillated. A month earlier, he had advised Froben, the great printer of Basel, to publish no more of Luther's work, because of its incendiary nature. In April he asked the Elector Frederick to continue to protect Luther from the ecclesiastical authorities. And then, on May 30, 1519, he wrote to Luther; it is a remarkable document:

Best greetings, most beloved brother in Christ. Your letter was most welcome to me, display-

ing a shrewd wit, and breathing a Christian spirit.

I could never find words to express what commotions your books have brought about here. They cannot even now eradicate from their minds the most false suspicion that your works were composed with my aid, and that I am the standard-bearer of this party, as they call it. They thought that they had found a handle wherewith to crush good learning—which they mortally detest as threatening to dim the majesty of theology, a thing they value far above Christ—and at the same time to crush me, whom they consider as having some influence on the revival of studies. The whole affair was conducted with such clamourings, wild talk, trickery, detraction, and cunning that, had I not been present and witnessed, nay, *felt* all this, I should never have taken any man's word for it that theologians could act so madly . . .

Erasmus' portrait of the scholastic "theologians" of Louvain should be familiar to anyone who has endured one of the recent inquisitions in Church of Christ colleges. He recounts his defense of himself, and then summons Luther to caution; it is better, he contends, not to attack Popes or Kings directly. "Where things are too generally accepted to be suddenly eradicated from men's minds, we must argue with repeated and efficacious proofs and not make positive assertions." And yet: "I am not advising you to do this, but only to continue doing what you are doing."

Erasmus' elaborate caution and powerful friends could not prevent his dismissal, more than a year later, from the University of Louvain. Luther's enemies were also his, yet he still refused to align himself with the forces of Reform. "I perceived that the better a man was, the less he was Luther's enemy," he complained to Cardinal Campeggio, and continued:

A few persons only were clamouring at him in alarm for their own pockets. . . . No one has yet answered him or pointed out his faults. . . . How, while there are persons calling themselves

bishops . . . whose moral character is abominable, can it be right to persecute a man of unblemished life, in whose writings distinguished and excellent persons have found so much to admire? The object has been simply to destroy him and his books out of mind and memory, and it can only be done when he is proved wrong. . . .

If we want truth, every man ought to be free to say what he thinks without fear. If the advocates of one side are to be rewarded with miters, and the advocates on the other with rope or stake, truth will not be heard.

But this eloquent defense of Luther is followed by Erasmus' statement of his own intentions:

Nothing could have been more invidious or unwise than the Pope's bull. It was unlike Leo X, and those who were sent to publish it only made things worse. It is dangerous, however, for secular princes to oppose the papacy, and I am not likely to be braver than princes, especially when I can do nothing. The corruption of the Roman court may require reform extensive and immediate, but I and the like of me are not called on to take a work like that upon themselves. I would rather see things left as they are than see a revolution that may lead to one knows not what. . . . You may assure yourself that Erasmus has been, and always will be, a faithful subject of the Roman See.

The Reformers felt that Erasmus had deserted their just cause; his enemies continued to identify him as a Reformer. "It is my fate," he wrote to a friend, "to be pelted by both parties while I endeavor to satisfy them both."

Simplicity Again . . .

In the end, it was Erasmus' antipathy toward "the people" that determined his stance toward the Reformation. He despised the veneration of images, but he was shocked and horrified when the Reformers of Basel pulled them down. In 1523 he wrote:

Piety requires that we should sometimes conceal truth, that we should take care not to show it always, as if it did not matter when, where, or to whom we show it. . . . Perhaps we

should admit with Plato that lies are useful to the people.

What he meant was that lies were useful to rulers for *control* of the people. Toward the end of his life, Erasmus published his plea to reunite the warring parties, *On Mending the Peace of the Church*. It is an irenic document, full of exhortations to tolerance and respect for the convictions of others. But the prejudices of Erasmus temper his insight. After lamenting the practice of providing money for masses and memorials after death for the purpose of propelling the dead out of limbo into heaven—money which could better be given to the poor—he then says, "But if we are not of this persuasion, we should not disturb the simplicity of those who are." And again, "Superstition, which I must admit is quite widespread in the invocation of the saints, should be corrected. Yet we must tolerate the pious simplicity of some, even when there is a certain amount of error involved. If our prayers are not heard by the saints, Christ, who loves simple souls, will give us what we request through the saints."

There it is again: Holy Simplicity. Simple Trusting Faith. Erasmus, along with most of the orthodox churchmen of his time and ours, does not trust the people with the tools to "work out their own salvation." And he exhibits a naive misunderstanding of the nature of power, believing that the princes and clergy who hold power can be persuaded to relinquish it voluntarily and abandon profitable abuses. He was not the last to indulge in such wishful thinking.

Lessons for Our Time . . .

I have not engaged in this enterprise merely as an academic exercise; I have neither the credentials, the time, nor the inclination for such an indulgence. I have under-

taken this task in order to reveal historical parallels to the present situation. I suggest that the dilemma of Erasmus is also the problem of his counterparts today—especially in the present atmosphere of the Churches of Christ and the United States of America.

The dichotomy between activism and relaxed intellectual inquiry has been with us for a long time. These two pursuits should be partners, but they have more often been regarded as mutually exclusive. “Liberal” intellectual sensibilities are more often offended by active attempts to correct iniquities than by the iniquities themselves. Erasmus’ naive attitudes toward the powerful and his distaste for active popular reform are very much alive in his intellectual heirs.

Should the man of studies also be a man of action? The decision is, and must be, an intensely personal one. Yet I suggest that the factors and presuppositions which lead to this decision will also inform the quality and content of one’s academic labours, and, more significantly, the impact and importance of his life as a human being. This is particularly true, in my opinion, of those whose studies are concerned with Jesus Christ.

In modern times, the most significant example of the effect of such a decision is the contrast between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann. Both men were in the midst of promising academic careers when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany; for both men great intellectual achievements could be seen to lie ahead. Both men signed the Barmen Confession and joined the Confessing Church in 1934. Bultmann prefaced a lecture on May 2, 1933, with a brief comment on the political situation, quoting Hitler himself against the budding excesses of the Nazis and calling for nationalism tem-

pered by the demands of the Christian faith. In this speech he specifically deplored injustice done to German Jews. But he did not speak out again; “I have made a point never to speak about current politics in my lectures, and I think I also shall not do so in the future,” he said, and kept his promise.

Many theologians—among them, Paul Tillich—were forced to leave Germany by the activities of the Third Reich. By 1936, Bonhoeffer had been forbidden to teach in Berlin. He had become a leader of the Resistance to Hitler within Germany. In 1939, during an American lecture tour, he was urged to remain in America; he elected to return to Germany and continue the struggle. After his return he was forbidden by the Gestapo to lecture, write, or make speeches of any kind. He became a confidant and courier in the plot to depose Hitler, and was finally arrested in 1943 and hanged in 1945.

During all of this, Bultmann was in Marburg, engaged with his teaching and “scientific work.” In 1941, while Hitler was ravaging all of Europe, Bultmann published the first of his famous essays seeking to “demythologize” the New Testament. This was certainly a landmark in Christian theology, and it is not my purpose here to minimize Bultmann’s contribution to theological discussion. But while Bultmann was writing elliptically about “authentic existence” Bonhoeffer was living it! And the contrast between the lives of these men is fully displayed in their published work; I submit that Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison* will continue to bear fruit in the lives of Christian men and women when Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament* and all the rest of his work will be only a footnote in the theological journals.

But what about our scholars in the Church of Christ today? I submit that a crisis is developing which will separate the Bonhoeffers from the Bultmanns to a degree unequaled in recent American church history. Over the past decade or so, beginning with the campaign against Robert Meyers at Harding College, sporadic purges have been conducted on the campuses of several Church of Christ colleges, particularly against professors of Bible and English. At one particular college, when a very popular professor was forced to leave after a bitter and poisonous campaign against him, another Bible professor said of his departed colleague, “Well, he wasn’t much of a scholar, anyway.” What this man will say when *he* gets the axe will be interesting to hear.

A Case in Point . . .

The current response to a recent article by Warren Lewis in *Mission* is a case in point. Mr. Lewis, a doctoral student in Germany, attempted to state in layman’s language the problems of differing accounts in the Four Gospels, or as he says, “to write four-letter word theology in Anglo-Saxon.” His stated purpose is reminiscent of Luther’s “plain German” in opposition to the Latinate technical jargon of most theological discussion. Mr. Lewis has incensed many “liberal” professors in Church of Christ colleges—it is one thing to discuss the “synoptic problem” or the “heilsgeschichte” in the safety of a graduate-level classroom or the *Journal of Biblical Literature* or even *Restoration Quarterly*; it is quite another thing to bring out the difficulties in *Mission* in plain Anglo-Saxon English. As one professor phrased it, “Warren has stirred up a lot of controversy, and we’re being confronted with it.”

Writing in the *Firm Foundation* soon after the publication of Mr. Lewis’ article,

Roy H. Lanier Sr. begins with a rather weak attempt to pick nits in Lewis’ logic, and then proceeds to the core of his attack. Noting that three members of the Abilene Christian College Bible faculty are Trustees of *Mission*, Mr. Lanier challenges them to repudiate Lewis’ article and *Mission*’s policy of free and open discussion. Mr. Lanier says that if these professors do not follow his edict on the matter, they must be dismissed from their posts at the college. Since Mr. Lanier has brought this attempted purge out in the open, it will be interesting to see how these professors and the administration of Abilene Christian College respond. If they capitulate, the forces of ignorance and inquisition will run rampant, as they always have, trumpeting the protection of the Simple Trusting Faith of the people who have been duped into financing their crusades.

I hope—and pray—that the administration of Abilene Christian College will take a quite different course—a course of courage and integrity. In so doing, the college will undoubtedly suffer financially and its professors will have to endure much defamation and abuse from people who are, in any case, the natural enemies of learning. But it is time to bring to an end the tyranny of self-appointed axe-wielders who have terrorized free and open inquiry in the Churches of Christ in this generation. It is time to declare independence from the tiny minority of preachers and editors who have set themselves up as the Popes and Grand Inquisitors of the Churches of Christ. It is time, in the words of Albert Camus, to “speak up clearly and pay up personally.” It is time for the heirs of Luther to act, and I pray to God that the heirs of Erasmus will join them.

Here we stand; we can do no other. God help us. Amen. □

WHERE SHALL WE WORSHIP?

JUDY ROMERO

A growing number of voices across the country are asking, "Where shall we worship?" More and more followers of Christ are being disfellowshipped from their congregations, or politely frozen out, because of their belief in the Holy Spirit, or "aids to worship," or other "heretical" views. This raises the question, "Where shall we worship? Where can we go for Christian fellowship?"

Some have gone to other denominations, where they can have fellowship with other believers, though disagreeing on some basic beliefs. Others have been fortunate enough to have several families to meet with, and in effect start another group. But no matter in what circumstance you may find yourself, there are some basic ideas about worship itself that may help clarify your situation.

Thousands of people sit in pews every Sunday supposedly worshipping, but their minds are far from God. Their bodies produce acts of worship, but their hearts are on their everyday activities, or the person sitting next to them, or their pride in their rightness about their worship. The problem is that somewhere along the line we have confused the *act* of worship with the *attitude* of worship. The apostle John wrote of being "in the spirit on the Lord's Day" (Rev.

1:10). This was the condition which enabled him to receive God's marvelous revelation of things to come. Being out of the Spirit and concerned with material controversies over the "worship service" is what prevents so many from truly worshipping God with their hearts. The acts of worship are insignificant compared with the attitude of the worshipper.

In John 4 Jesus stressed this difference to the woman at the well. She was preoccupied with the current controversy over the proper place to worship. "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:20-24). The place of worship is unimportant when the worship is produced in spirit and truth.

When we begin truly to worship in spirit and truth, we will automatically see the foolishness and unimportance of fighting and arguing over "aids to worship." An aid to worship may be an organ or a book of hymns (*neither* is mentioned in the scriptures); to some believers it may be a crucifixion statue. But the desire to worship must be there be-

fore an aid can be an aid. All the aids in the world cannot produce worship. Going through the act of worship does not produce worship, but a desire to worship will automatically produce acts of worship. A robed priest intoning a ritual mass is about equal to a Church of Christ preacher droning the ritual line of creed which everyone already knows by heart. One is just as traditional (as opposed to scriptural) as the other, and just as easy to go to sleep by. But the believer who is worshipping in the spirit is not hindered in his worship by either, for his attention is on God. "To the pure, all things are pure" (Tit. 1:15). So also, to the worshipper, all things are worship!

"We are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Paul went on in the following verses to tell of the zeal he had had in practicing the law, even to persecuting the church, because he felt he was doing the *right* things. But now he counts all those things as loss. Now he has been converted to Christ, not to a law. "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (vs. 8-9). Releasing the works of the law, or of the flesh, is what enables him—and us—to "worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus."

In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus told the Pharisees what was wrong with their worship: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the pre-

cepts of men." But the Pharisees' traditions were no more precepts of men than are our traditions about how many cups to use for the Lord's supper, or who is "faithful" enough to offer a prayer in the service. We have deserted the true worship of God when our minds are taken up with the legalistic "how-tos" of the worship service.

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: . . . strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit. . . . I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:18-21). (I deliberately left out the "fornication, uncleanness," etc., because this is where so many of the brethren get hung up, and never get on to strife and party spirit.) It is very evident that many of our churches are producing the works of the flesh in their worship, not the works of the Spirit. It goes back to the fact that we have not been worshipping in spirit and truth. Being so concerned with fleshly acts produces fleshly worship, which in turn produces works of the flesh. When we grow up enough to leave the works of the flesh behind, then we will experience real peace and joy in our worship. When we begin to walk by the Spirit, all the complicated puzzles and questions will be transcended, and worship will become very simple and beautiful.

Wherever God leads you, you can worship in spirit and in truth. Whether you feel led to sit in a Church of Christ service, or Pentecostal, or Catholic, your worship depends on what is in your heart, not on your surroundings. In addition, the Spirit will give you opportunities to study and teach those around you in love and gentleness, leading them to a better knowledge of the truth. "If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk" (Gal. 5:25). □

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Does Abstinence Make the Heart Grow Fonder?

HOY LEDBETTER

God's grace has always had to contend with asceticism. Asceticism holds that the spiritual state to which the Christian aspires can best be reached through renunciation of things commonly considered pleasant. In the extreme, this gospel of negation (as it has been called) has led saints to deliberately go without adequate shelter or apparel, to wear coarse clothing and even chains, whip themselves, deprive themselves of sleep, or withdraw from the world and sit on pillars in the desert. Some common ascetic symptoms discoverable in the New Testament are fasting, withdrawal from the world, deliberate poverty, abstinence from marriage (or from sexual relations in marriage), and various rules and regulations ("do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"—Col. 2:21).

Modern symptoms . . .

There is evidence of considerable ascetic influence in the church today. The restrictions Paul opposed at Colossae ("do not handle, do not taste, do not touch") have been widely used by misinformed Christians to condemn disapproved practices. The use of tobacco (quite apart from the hazards of cigarette smoking) is still a favorite target of many preachers; and some missionaries have similarly made chewing of betel nut a primary point of attack. Card playing, movies, and dancing are indiscriminately opposed in many churches. Moderate use of wine, the

common practice of Jesus and the early church, is undoubtedly in some groups less tolerable than gossip and lying. In a society that is extremely permissive in matters of sex, not a few still feel that sex is inherently dirty. Not only have some of us come to believe that everything we like is either sinful or fattening; we feel that it *must* be so. Fasting, though by no means widespread, is frequent enough that some doctors regard it as a potential health hazard.

Such heaping up of rules and regulations can have very harmful effects. I remember vividly a girl who did not want to be baptized because her father insisted that when she became a Christian she would have to give up going to the movies. Evidently in her home, movies were of no ethical consequence unless one had been baptized. Some of our religious schools—and churches—are turning away a generation of young people in need of Christian influence by superfluous rules about hair and dress.

Worse yet, we have a tendency to withdraw from the world into church buildings, not merely for rehabilitation and spiritual power to carry on the battle, but for protection and overprotection from the world's contamination. It is much easier for us to give up the fight and withdraw from the real battlefield than it is to trust the Holy Spirit to give us power to win victory over the enemy. As Carl Ketcherside has remarked, our problem is not getting people into

church, it is getting them out. We are also wary of appearances, fearful of using our property for anything that might mar our artificial mantle of holiness. "It's not whether you win or lose—it's how your grass looks!" comes close to being the slogan.

Historically the growth of asceticism has corresponded to a decline in inward spirituality. When the inner man wanes, the tendency to rely on external acts and forms increases. To paraphrase Robespierre, when God does not exist for us, we try to invent him. When prophetic inspiration became only a memory, men resorted to various ascetic practices—such as fasting and loss of sleep—in order to induce it. At least *some*—certainly not *all*—pneumatics today have their own recipes for priming the pump.

Points of conflict . . .

Since the very heart of the gospel is salvation by grace, not works, the writers of the New Testament naturally viewed asceticism as a serious threat, for it is essentially an attempt to achieve salvation by works. Its very name (from the Greek *askeo*, to work) labels it as a contradiction of the good news. No matter how attractive the garb in which it appears, it remains a human effort that nullifies God's grace.

This is not to say that abstinence and austerity have no place in the Christian life. But abstinence must always be the *effect* of spirituality, not its *cause*. Jesus taught self-denial, but he never hinted that self-denial is in and for itself meritorious. We must be careful that we do not rob the Christian life of its motive. Listen to Emil Brunner: "Duty and goodness are mutually exclusive. Obedience due to a sense of unwilling restraint is bondage, and, indeed, the bondage of sin. If I feel I *ought* to do right, it is a

sign that I cannot do it. If I could really do it, there would be no question of 'ought' about it at all. The sense of 'ought' shows me the Good at an infinite impassable distance from my will. Willing obedience is never the fruit of an 'ought' but only of love" (*The Divine Imperative*, 74). Needless to say, the love which makes this statement valid is that of the Christian who walks by the Spirit.

It may be argued that our rules are not designed to *produce* an intimate relation with God but only to *reflect* it. But the key question here is: are such abstinences wholly a matter of choice? Individual freedom in such decisions was dearly cherished in the early church. As Donald Mackenzie wrote: "The NT is not afraid to place in the Christian conscience the decision of what is to be abstained from and what is not, because it believes in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and because it exalts personal responsibility" (*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, I, 6). An additional but more difficult question would consider the amount of pride (which is essentially opposed to God) involved. Does Paul's Colossian critique apply here? "I know that these regulations look wise with their self-inspired efforts at worship, their policy of self-humbling, and their studied neglect of the body. But in actual practice they do honor, not to God, but to man's own pride" (Col. 2:23, Phillips).

There is ample guidance in the New Testament for answering such questions, and one of the most instructive passages is 1 Corinthians 7, to which we now turn.

The fundamental issue . . .

The correct starting point for interpreting the chapter, it seems to me, is to regard the statement "It is well for a man not to

touch a woman" as a quotation from a Corinthian source. This is the rendering of the NEB margin and Moffatt and is supported by several commentaries. It also receives support from the context: the sections that precede and follow it also begin with similar quotes. And the discussion which ensues makes much more sense if we first agree that Paul is dealing with ascetic influence in Corinth. There is yet another advantage: Paul is often thought to present a low view of marriage and women in this chapter, and much labor has been devoted to reconciling his statements here with the rest of the Bible. This approach makes such efforts unnecessary.

"It is a good thing for a man to have nothing to do with women" (v.1). Paul's response is *strictly qualified* agreement. It may be true; but it will not apply where there is "so much immorality." On the contrary, because of this immorality, men and women should get married. Moreover, they must also see to it that each partner gives to the other his (or her) due, and neither can claim his body as his own (vv. 2-4). We should note that Paul stresses exact equality of the sexes—a point of view which was certainly a novelty for that time. Wife and husband had equal claims and responsibilities. The status which Paul claims for the wife confutes the idea that he had a low view of women.

In verse 5 he makes a concession to celibacy, but it is one that is severely limited:

1. It must be by mutual consent; otherwise one would be robbing the other.
2. It must be a temporary abstinence; a long separation would be dangerous.
3. It must be for a religious purpose: that they might devote themselves to prayer. As soon as this purpose is met they are to come together again, to avoid being tempted by

Satan because of their lack of self-control.

Paul then adds in verse 6: "I say this by way of concession, not of command." The concession he makes (to the ascetic point of view) is that the couple may temporarily separate by mutual agreement for prayer. They do not have to—it is not a command—but they *may*.

The reason for these instructions, involving such a limited concession, is given in verse 7: "I wish that all were as I myself am." This is often taken to mean that he desires them all to remain unmarried, as he was himself. But the context favors taking "as I myself am" as a reference to freedom from sexual temptation, which for some would only be possible in the married state as qualified in verse 5. Since he has said that "each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband," obviously not all could be unmarried. Yet Paul's use of *wish* (*thelo*) indicates that what he desires can be attained. "When he uses the present tense (as here) he intends to express a wish that is capable of realization, and ought to be realized, almost a command" (C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 158). This freedom from fornication can be expressed in different ways: "each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." Some are free outside of marriage, others are free only in marriage; that is the way God made us.

So "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" is true only in a pragmatic sense, never in a moral sense. But there is something to be said for being unmarried. "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (vv. 8-9). Although celibacy may be *well* for some, mar-

riage may be *better* for others, depending on one's "own special gift from God."

The instructional richness of this chapter would abundantly reward a verse-by-verse exposition of the remainder, but unfortunately I must confine myself to a few important high points.

"With God . . ."

That perennial tendency to fly from the world in ascetic retreat receives no support. Rather Paul says, "Let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him" (v. 17). There is to be no frustrated longing for a reversal of situations, even among slaves. "Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ" (vv. 21-22). And the clincher comes in verse 24: "in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God." *With God*—that is the key. Instead of flying to the hills or the desert, stay where you are, *with God*. Instead of bemoaning the fact that you are only a mechanic or a housewife or a preacher, live that life *with God*. Our lives are not unfruitful because of our occupations or limited education or restricted environment. They are unfruitful because they are not lived *with God*. With him we have no need to fly, for he can glorify our ministry where we are. If you are a slave, never mind. But if you can move up, use the opportunity. But wherever you go, go *with God*.

The God of grace and the grace of God is our power in any situation, and it is enough. It must be evident that many of us have the form of religion but deny the power of it.

Jesus warned his disciples against preparing their own speeches when dragged before the authorities (Mt. 10:19ff.). We must have the same confidence in the Spirit which he urged upon them. Our security will not depend on our own calculations, but on our Lord. He *knows* and he *does* what we need. He will not always give us what we strive for, but he will enable us to maintain an aloofness from unhappy circumstances which will provide us with liberation from care.

"As though not . . ."

To this Paul directs himself in 1 Corinthians 7:29ff. "I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away."

The challenge here is Paul's *as though not*. This does not mean that marriage and crying and laughing and commerce are to be annihilated, but they are to be subordinated. Certainly the Christian cannot ignore the claims of his wife; Paul has already contradicted that notion. But all of the relations, experiences, and activities of his life must receive a new orientation. His worldly ties must be kept at a distance. *As though not!* Not *not*, but *as though not*. Maintain your marriage. Cry. Laugh. Buy. Use the world. But remember that these are at best only temporal. They are not the last word. Man does not live by bread alone—if so the devil has appeal—but by the will of God. Whatever happens to us will be under God's control. This is the importance of his lordship.

But the ascetic will not allow such liberty from care, and the society he influences will always be anxiety-ridden. Therefore he must be opposed. Paul continues in 7:32ff.: "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided." (Practically the same thing is said about women in the following verses.) It is typical to see in these verses two kinds of anxiety, one good and the other bad. But there is an alternative explanation (suggested by Barrett) which I find more attractive. That is, both anxieties are wrong. The ascetic seeks to win God's favor through the performance of meritorious works. Hence he can never know the peace with God that comes from being justified by faith. He worries about how to please the Lord (or, in the case of the woman, how to be holy in body and spirit). Such a person, though unmarried (because he is ascetic?), insults God's grace. He is no better off than the married man whose interests are divided because of his anxiety about pleasing his wife. Paul

would have us to be free from both kinds of anxiety.

But the Christian is not without some responsibility. He must not needlessly invite trouble. This whole discussion is colored by "the impending distress" mentioned in verse 26. Whatever that expression refers to would bring troubles upon the saints, and, as Leon Morris so aptly puts it, "When high seas are raging it is no time for changing ships." At such a time any adaptation to a new situation might be too much of a challenge. If you are unmarried, do not take on additional responsibility unless it is outweighed by the strength of your own sexual impulses. And if you are married, do not initiate separation from your present mate, even if you are married to an unbeliever. Marriage is no sin. Celibacy is no sin. But binding either is.

When Paul gives instructions about the widow in the concluding paragraph, he says, "But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is." What God seeks is our happiness! It is a tragedy that we allow ascetic influences to make the Christian life a burden rather than the blessing it is intended to be. □

REACTIONS FROM READERS

"Your Word" and "the Word"

An employee served a boss whom he not only admired and respected as an employer, but whom he also loved as an intimate friend. One day the boss was called away unexpectedly and left a letter for his trusted friend and employee with instructions for the time he would be away. When the employee read his friend's letter he tossed it aside and refused to honor the instructions with it. "I don't follow a letter," he said. "My relationship is not with a written word; it is with a living friend."

So he did what he thought best instead of what his employer had said. Sort of ridiculous, isn't it?

And yet one can see this philosophy seriously espoused with relation to Jesus and his written word over and over again. One of the most recent examples of it is in the poem "I'm Coming, Jesus" by Judy Romero (*Integrity*, February, 1972).

"We have your 'word,' Jesus, we don't need you now," some church people are represented as saying. "Jesus says, 'I am the Word,' and He turns away." This does not mean, however, that she has no "word" from "the Word." The poem begins, "I sit on a mountain and I hear God's still small voice, speaking peace and love. His Holy Spirit whispers quietness and strength. He speaks unutterable wisdoms in my ear, in the quiet night places."

I am not unaware of the presence of the Living Christ in my life and in the life of all Christians. I rejoice in the "mystery which has . . . now been manifested to His saints . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:26-29).

Neither am I unaware of the presence of the "prince of this world's darkness," who "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8); or of the fact that "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (Jas. 1:14). The person who follows the "still small voice" heard while "sitting on a mountain" or the "unutterable wisdoms" whispered in the ear "in the quiet night places," while disdaining the written word of the Lord, is much more likely to be following his own inclinations and desires than he is to be following the will of God.

"Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" said the apostle John (1 Jn. 4:1); and then he proceeded to give the test by which the spirits could be discerned, whether they be of God or not. It was by whether or not they spoke the truth on the particular matter that was at issue at the moment: Was Jesus Christ come in the flesh? There he concludes, "we are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 Jn. 4:6). Paul proclaimed the same test: "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14:37-38). And again, "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

Passages with that sentiment could be multiplied. Perhaps it would merely be said that we are arguing in a circle, proving the word by the word. But if the written word is unreliable, what do we have left? There is then no knowledge of the living Christ. Outside of brief allusions by four Roman historians and a questionable passage in Josephus, we are dependent on "his word" to know about "the Word." If the word of Christ richly dwells within us and becomes our meditation night and day, and our will becomes one with His as there expressed, then we might without harm interpret some of our inclinations as the will of God without realizing they came through our knowledge of the written word. But what of the man whose "still

small voice . . . in the quiet night places" told him to leave his wife and take up with a younger, more attractive woman? Was that a voice of God? Or was it the voice of his own lust falsely interpreted to be the voice of God? And, most importantly, is there any criterion by which that question can be settled?

The Scriptures are our letter from the living Word by which we know His will. He makes himself ridiculous who claims to love and follow Him while refusing to do His will thus expressed, and they are most in tune with Him who most fully accept and mold their lives by His word.

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God's Grace

[I wish] to commend Craig M. Watts for his excellent article, "The Galatian Heresy." Out of an opportunity which I had some years ago to write a Master's thesis on Paul's Use of *Charis* (Grace), I have a special appreciation for his insightful analysis of the message of Galatians and the current unscriptural view expressed by some. Of course the great tragedy resulting from frustrating the Grace of God is that we make Christ's death for us in vain.

MIKE ANGLIN

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Evangelistic Ethics

I was especially pleased with the April issue of *Integrity* and Perry Cotham's article on "The Ethics of Evangelistic Persuasion." I have had some misgivings on some of our current practices and was glad to see his research along this line. I agree with him that we need to do a thorough study of this aspect of our work, and am thankful that you have provided a forum for this.

VERNON BOYD

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The Holy Spirit Today

Readers of *Integrity* may be interested in receiving copies of the booklet, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ Today*, which features many men in our fellowship who ardently claim to have received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For as long as they last we will send a free copy to anyone requesting the booklet.

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