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JUST WONDERING

PAMELA J. KEMP

West Lafayette, Indiana

Have you been exposed to a case of the "Wonders" lately? On a brief visit I noticed my young nephew displaying the classic symptom of beginning sentences with "I wonder why . . ." or "I wonder what would happen if . . ." That started a chain of thought in which I recalled some of my own childhood wonderings: "I wonder why clouds have shapes . . . I wonder if I could dig a hole deep enough to see what the devil looks like . . . I wonder how a ghost can be holy . . . I wonder if women school teachers ever wear slacks . . . I wonder where animals go when they die . . ."

Perhaps you've experienced that once a chain of thought is begun it may take an unexpected turn. That's what happened to me as I was recalling my childhood wonderings. Suddenly I was faced with a fresh wondering: I wonder why so few adults ever verbalize their present wonderings. Do other adults ever wonder about such things? Do they follow their wonderings, or repress them? Do we fear our own questions? Or do we fear the reaction of other people to our questions? What would happen if one person actually voiced his wonderings? Would he be put down, or would he start a chain reaction of creative wondering?

This article is an attempt to discover some answers. I'll share some of my religious wonderings and the questions that occur as a result. *Integrity* invites readers to choose one or more train of thought and follow through on it to a personally satisfying conclusion. A few readers may wish to

share their conclusions in follow-up articles or letters to the editor.

I think that you will discover, as I have, that a few guidelines will prove helpful: (1) do not rush the thought process; (2) do not consult "authorities" until you have chewed the matter over thoroughly; when you are ready to seek other viewpoints go first to the Bible and then to any other source that comes to mind; (3) refuse to allow your superego to censure your thoughts unless they are indisputably sinful, according to biblical, not cultural, standards; (4) jot down your ideas and questions, no matter how silly or bizarre they may at first appear; (5) accept any conclusion you may reach as tentative, subject to revision as the Spirit or your own reason may lead.

Ready to begin?

I wonder how love, usually thought to be an emotion, can be commanded.

Does that imply that the emotions are totally subject to internal control, no matter what the circumstances? Or is love not an emotion? Could it be a dispassionate attitude of concern for the other person's best interests, as C. S. Lewis suggests? Might it be purely a matter of doing, rather than feeling? What is the opposite of love—hate or indifference? How is it different from liking? Do they always occur in tandem? Since I am commanded to love, am I also by implication commanded to like? How do I love a Hitler? How do I like him? What are the implica-

tions of Jesus, our example of perfect love, running the money changers from the temple or calling the Pharisees names like "hypocrites" and "whitewashed tombs"? What is meant by loving my neighbor "as myself"? How do I love myself? How is this type of self-love compatible with Jesus' command to "deny self" to follow him? What did he mean? Can one who has never learned to love himself love others? Can he deny self? Is there, as Paul Tournier suggests (*A Place for You*), an inescapable prerequisite to denying self? How is (or is?) Christian love different from non-Christian love? Is the love that is described as a fruit of the Spirit any particular type of love? Have we American Christians inherited any cultural misconceptions about love? Finally, what is love?

I wonder why God puts up with insolence and insubordination like Job's and accusations like Jeremiah's (Jer. 20:7).

How does God deal with rebels in the Bible: Jonah, Job, Jeremiah, Judas? Is all sin rebellion? Is all rebellion sin? What kind of rebellion is sin? What seems to be the determining factor(s) in how God deals with rebellion? What part does rebellion play in the maturation of a child? Why do psychiatrists such as Paul Tournier feel that "the way to adulthood lies necessarily through revolt"? Is doubt a prerequisite to faith? Is faith static or dynamic? What's the difference between faith and dogma? How could Job reject the dogma of his "friends," yet discover a profound existential faith? What was the final result of the Prodigal Son's rebellion? How did his "unrebellious" brother fare? In the parable of the two sons going into the vineyard at their father's request, which son pleased God? What can be potentially

healthful results of rebellion? What determines the results? What does all this teach us about how we should deal with rebels?

I wonder why so many Christians "crack up."

Why do psychiatrists often claim that Christians are inhibited and guilt ridden? Is there truth in the claim? If so, why do we become enslaved by guilt when we claim that Jesus forgives and sets us free (Rom. 8:1)? Why do we attend public worship, Bible study, prayer meeting, etc.? Do we go willingly, or out of neurotic compulsion? Is "in Jesus name" at the end of our prayers a meaningful phrase or a superstitious talisman? Why is it so threatening to change the traditional order of worship? What would happen if someone cried *Hallelujah!* or *Praise the Lord!* during the service? What would happen if someone other than the preacher felt that God had given him a message to share with the congregation? What would a sufferer like Job find to console him in our services? What do these imagined scenarios tell us about the church? Why do we not touch, confess our sins one to another, pray for one another, share our joys and sorrows? How could greater spontaneity and more genuine worship be facilitated? How can we be set free, as Jesus promised?

I wonder why we Christians take religious things so seriously.

Why do we laugh at jokes about Catholic priests and bristle at jokes about Church of Christ preachers? Why is it necessary to read a book like Elton Trueblood's *The Humor of Christ* before we are able to see any humor in the Bible? Why is *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Heaven* sold under the counter at a certain

Church of Christ bookstore? Why have a few Christian readers found it necessary to *whisper* that they appreciated my satirical article on nonsectarian child-rearing?

What is sacred anyway? How long is the list? Is the church sacred? If so, which church? Is an utterance beyond reproach because of who says it—a preacher, an editor, a Christian college president, a large financial backer? Why do we fear calling the ridiculous “ridiculous”? Does God see our bickering little sect as too solemn for humor, or do we appear more like a squabbling class of kindergarteners, all wanting to be first in line? If we can’t laugh at ourselves, why not? Ego? Vested interests? Confused concepts of the church? Unwillingness to admit a part in the human condition? Insufficient experiential knowledge of grace and forgiveness? And by the way, is the sacred always solemn?

I wonder if God is still working through history, as he did as recorded in the scriptures.

Can he still change disaster into victory? Can he still bring good from the actions of even those who, like Cyrus in the book of Isaiah, do not acknowledge him? Does he speak only through “our” men? What events and people might he be working through now? What can we learn from the movements of today? Might the ecology kick remind us that we have neglected to exercise proper beneficent care over the environment entrusted to us? Might the searching of many teenagers and young adults for significant human relationships in communes or Jesus movements remind us that the church is meant to be an extended family-type relationship? Are so many middle-class youth turning to drugs to find fulfillment and emotional release that the church has

failed to let Jesus provide? If Jesus can set us free, why don’t we let him so that groups like Black Power and Women’s Liberation don’t have to point at the church and say, “We were in prison and you visited us not”? Must we not constantly permit ourselves, as individuals and members of Christ’s Body, to be open to biblical truth through whatever mode it may be presented?

I wonder why we see the sins and assumptions of another culture so much more easily than those of our own.

Is this due to ignorance of the fact that culture exists? Can one who has never lived in another culture ever truly understand, or even see, his own country’s cultural assumptions? Is it possible to de-culturate Christians to unbiblical aspects of their own cultural heritage? What are some aspects of our culture that may be unbiblical? Individualism carried to an extreme? Acute time consciousness and schedule orientation? Busy-ness for its own sake? Fear of solitude and contemplation? Belief that the church building is essential or necessarily beneficial? Assumption that preachers and missionaries are a holy class? Selection of elders and deacons based more on business ability than spirituality? Assumption that free enterprise and democracy are the only acceptable vehicles for spread of Christianity? Subtle downgrading of racial minorities, single women, elderly, intellectually or physically handicapped?

Is it possible that some of the verses that we interpret as commands might actually be relevant only to the particular culture in which they were written? How does one tell? To what extent is it necessary to organize all binding commands into an orderly list? Might this typically American passion

for order hide a sinful desire to standardize a vital, life-changing force that may never have been intended to be reduced to the lifeless order of a checklist?

I wonder why we act as though intellectual pursuits were dangerous.

Why do professors at Christian colleges occasionally find themselves unemployed for tentatively stating an honest, but divergent opinion? Why are many Christian (in the broad sense) magazines and books so shallow and poorly written? Why are some scholars, professors, writers, and editors told to sell their minds or pack their suitcases?

Is Christ Lord of all, or is he not Lord of all? If he is Lord of all, doesn’t that “all” include the world of ideas? Is he who gave us our minds pleased to see them lie dormant? Is Christianity so puerile that followers of Christ must be kept in intellectual isolation? Why are we on the defensive anyway? Isn’t it about time that we promote excellence as vehemently as we now promote conformity?

Is our faith intellectually defensible? If our God put this universe together, why need we worry that a flaw will be found in the works? Should we not rather explore as

joyful, free children the wonderful world our Father has made?

I wonder what on earth the church is good for.

What is the church’s role in the world? What does it mean to be Christ’s Body? If we are God’s chosen ones, for what purpose are we chosen? Why was Israel chosen? How did she misunderstand her calling? How may we as the Church misunderstand our calling? What role did suffering play in the life of Israel and Jesus? In the life of the Church what role may it have? How did Jesus fulfill the role of Suffering Servant (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12)? How did Israel? How may the Church? What does all this mean to me in practical terms? What may it mean this day?

Father, we bring to you our wonderings, not as though you did not already know them, but acknowledging that in fact you do know our every thought. Before you we dare not be dishonest. Enable us also to be honest with ourselves and with others.

May your Spirit guide our explorations and turn our insights into loving action. Keep ever before us our goal: to grow more like Jesus. □

THAT WHICH IS PERFECT

One of the most popular numbers we have printed was one in which I had an article entitled “The Perfect in 1 Cor. 13:10.” That our surplus soon disappeared indicates the intense interest in this subject. A few weeks ago the *Christian Chronicle* printed a supplement entitled “That Which Is Perfect” in which six different writers reached a variety of conclusions on the meaning of this expression. The writers were Leroy Garrett, John McRay, Roy Osborne, Jim Reynolds, Rubel Shelley, and Carl Spain. Copies of this booklet may be obtained at 25 cents each (minimum order \$2.50) by writing to Sweet Publishing Company, Box 4055, Austin, Texas 78765. —HGL

JUST AS CHRIST ACCEPTED US

CRAIG M. WATTS

Westland, Michigan

No great biblical doctrine stands alone. We find this especially true when studying the character of God. No attribute of God can be ignored without leaving us with a very lopsided image of God in our minds and an extremely unbalanced image of God in our lives. We are to be a visible display of the invisible God, just as Christ was during his bodily ministry. For this reason it is very important that we both rightly understand the great biblical doctrines about God and resist the temptation to separate these great doctrines from our day to day lives.

It is in the character of God alone that we find the true meaning of right and wrong. A law can correctly describe "good" or "bad" only in so far as it is rooted in the essential nature of God. God does not declare one thing "wrong" and another "right" simply because he so desires. God is not arbitrary. Our Lord does not make laws without reason; he does not make laws simply because he has the authority to do so. "Right" is *not* conformity to an arbitrary decree; rather it is an expression of the character of God. An action or an attitude is "right" because it is in harmony with who God is and with what he is like. In other words, certain things are sinful because they are *ungodly*, while others are righteous because they are *godly*, or like God.

In the scriptures the attributes of God are often pointed out in order to motivate similar characteristics in disciples. The command of Peter concerning holiness is based in the nature of God: "As he who called you

is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:16). Peter knew that true holiness could never be decided by an arbitrary law; God himself is the standard. We are to be holy because God is holy, not simply because there is a law concerning holiness.

This principle holds true in other areas that are fundamental to the Christian faith. John's appeal for love is centered in God himself. His plea is rooted in the basic nature of God: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn. 4:7-11).

In Ephesians Paul used this same approach with forgiveness. He called upon the people to imitate God in their actions: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). Paul repeated his appeal when he wrote to the Colossians: "Forbear one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:13).

This principle of conduct has been largely overlooked in the area of fellowship. Just as we are to love because God is love, be holy for God is holy, and forgive because God forgives, we are also to find our basis of fellowship in the ways of God. Our actions must be in harmony with our Lord. We

must accept each other on the same basis that God has accepted us. Paul made this plain in Romans when he wrote: "Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7, NASB). Or as Phillips' version says, "Open your hearts to one another as Christ has opened his heart to you, and God will be glorified." Notice that "God will be glorified" only if we receive one another as God has received us. There is no glory to God if we do otherwise. Our fellowship must have its foundation within God himself in order for it to be of value.

How God Accepts Us . . .

If we must accept one another as Christ has accepted us, the question must arise: "Upon what basis does God accept us?" There are really only two possible views: either God accepts us because we are in doctrinal and moral harmony with him, or he accepts us in spite of the fact that we have not conformed to his ways. The basis of our fellowship with God is either by grace or by works. It is reasonably and scripturally impossible for the basis of our fellowship to be both grace and works; it is one or the other. Paul made it clear that, though works and grace can complement one another when each is recognized in its proper place, *they can never find a place together as a basis of salvation*. Paul, speaking of the remnant of Israel which was chosen by grace, said, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). The moment works are brought in as a basis of fellowship with God, grace must be eliminated.

If God has accepted us because we have conformed to his image in doctrine and deed, then we have a right to demand conformity from one another, since we are to

receive each other just like Christ has received us. But is conformity or works the basis of our salvation? Who can say that he has security in Christ because he is in total harmony with God in mind and action? So if we have fellowship with God in spite of our disharmony in doctrine and life, then how dare anyone make conformity to one another the basis of fellowship among men?

The sole basis of our salvation and fellowship with God is *grace*. In the cross and from the empty tomb come all of our hope, joy and peace. We have peace with God through the gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Men reap the blessings of Christ's sacrifice when they place all of their trust in what *he did* and then submit themselves to share in his death, burial, and resurrection by baptism (Rom. 6:1-11). The Christian sees his relationship with God as being based in grace alone, while the relationship is sustained by faith alone (Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:8-10). Though this relationship of love is neither based in nor obtained by works, still works flow freely from the true man of faith. "You shall know them by their fruits." The man who has placed his trust in the gospel of grace and has shared in the gospel by obedience in baptism now is free and willing to please his Lord. It is in the gospel that God has received us, not in the many biblical teachings that have been given to man. We must ever remember that the gospel is *not* the total sum of the biblical teachings; rather it is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4). This doctrine alone has the power to save (Rom. 1:16-17). No doctrinal error is too big to be *continually* forgiven as long as that error is not an offence to the gospel. No moral error of the person with true, seeking faith is too much for the grace of God to cover. "Where sin

increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20).

Most men recognize the fact that grace is the basis of our fellowship with God; nevertheless many never really come to see that grace and works are mutually exclusive in this area. They see grace and fellowship with God as things that are received when one attains certain moral and doctrinal heights. Generally these men are rather vague when they are questioned about absolute limits. When they are asked just how wrong a sincere, seeking Christian can be and yet remain in God's grace, they usually admit that they do not know. But if they are pressed further, we soon find out that they believe that though one can never be perfect in life or doctrine, *he must be as close to perfect as they are, or nearly so.* Such men do not really believe in God's grace, nor do they care to receive others as God has received them. Though they cannot fail to realize that they themselves cannot measure up to God as their standard, they still set themselves (with their understanding of the scriptures) up as the standard for others to conform to. They forever fail to see that any doctrinal or moral conformity (works) is the result of salvation and fellowship rather than their basis. So even though their voices ring with "Salvation by grace," their actions scream "*Works!*"

A Biblical Example . . .

Peter is a biblical example of this sort of inconsistency. Paul explained this in the Galatian letter: "When Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. . . . *I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*" (Gal. 2:11-14a).

Please take note of the last sentence of the above passage. Though Peter was the first apostle to learn "that God shows no partiality" to Jew or Gentile (Acts 10:34, 35), and though he was the first man to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, he failed to live the truth he spoke. He preached that all who trusted in God's grace could be accepted, but still Paul could say that Peter was "not straightforward about the truth of the gospel."

There is a multitude of modern Peters who may preach God's grace but in action let racial, cultural and doctrinal barriers stand tall. The difficulty of many to receive men of differing races is evident. Too few in the Church of Christ have been "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" in this matter. Also in the cultural realm acceptance by grace has been a great problem for many missionaries. The tendency to westernize or Americanize is prominent. In the United States a great number of church leaders, through local congregations, periodicals, and Christian colleges, encourage cultural bigotry in relationship to the rising youth culture or counterculture. Sermons, articles, and Christian college rules against longer hair, beards, clothes and general life style of this culture, are hindering unity by God's grace. Naturally the walls many are building are erected in the name of righteousness, but the ungodly fruits of hostility and alienation show the true nature of the attitude many men have encouraged.

But the inconsistent actions of those who claim acceptance of God by grace is perhaps the most pronounced in the doctrinal area.

Without logic or scripture, differences concerning certain doctrines are tolerated, while for other doctrines of lesser importance strict conformity is demanded. The classic example concerns the Christian's involvement in war. No one can rightly say that the scriptures do not deal with this question, yet conflicting views are tolerated. The pacifist who believes taking human life during war is sin will accept the brother who believes that such killing is right, and yet will refuse to receive the brother who would seek to worship God while using a musical instrument. He will receive the killer while rejecting the worshipper. The unreasonable inconsistency is evident.

If the fellowship is not based in the grace of God, consistency will not be possible. While our goal in unity should be agreement (1 Cor. 1:10), our basis for unity and fellowship cannot be. Our acceptance with God is based in the gospel. *The truth that has set*

us free is Jesus Christ himself, not all of the doctrines in the Bible (Jn. 8:32, 36). The limits of fellowship must be determined by the gospel rather than by a certain portion of the Bible.

"Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." As followers of the Lord we must accept others upon the same basis that God has accepted us—it must be by grace. God will not receive glory if we do otherwise. We must find fellowship that is rooted in faith in the gospel and participation in the death, burial and resurrection through baptism. Race or culture must not be a barrier. By grace we must let our differences concerning instrumental music, spiritual gifts, orphan homes, the Lord's supper, and other such matters take a place of secondary importance. By virtue of the gospel God has accepted man. Now upon that same basis man must accept man, "and God will be glorified." □

ON BEING A SPECTATOR, A LEADER AND A PARTICIPANT

Joe Hale

There are many who choose to be spectators.
There are a few who choose to be leaders.
There are some who want to be participants.

A spectator is never a participant.
Many times a leader cannot be a participant.
A participant is both a leader and a spectator.

In worship to God one must be a participant.
In addition he must lead himself to follow.
And he must anticipate witnessing the spectacular.

A church leader must be careful to remember
that true worshippers must be participants
and opportunity must be made for them to lead.

TURNING FROM THE WOMB

BETTY HAYMES

Dover, New Jersey

Since ancient times, the word "woman" seems to have been, and continues to be, synonymous with "womb." Biological make-up thus determines roles. Woman has been imprisoned and enmeshed in biological processes, to the exclusion of participation in mental, political, economic, social and religious concerns.

In Church of Christ doctrine women may be accepted as "spiritually" equal (Gal. 4:28), but they remain inferior and subordinate to men in sexual, economic, political, social and religious spheres. This situation exists because it has been accepted by the majority as the "way it is" and, therefore, the way it has to be.

In church life women are denied the direct avenues of effective action which are available to men. Women are excluded from "business meetings" and other decision-making groups. Many single or widowed career women who have contributed generous sums of money to "the work of the church" have no access to affect decisions as to its use.

Christian women are beginning to feel these restrictions are unfair and unwise. Many of us were taught from early years to view ourselves as "wombs"—that family and marriage were the only legitimate life-paths. But more and more women are becoming convinced that no one has the right to limit the aspirations of any human being. Many women have opted for being a person,

whether choosing a family and/or a career.

Traditionally, "ladies' classes" are the deadly result of the attempt to keep women uninvolved in the *real* church action and issues. It is much safer to keep them "womb" oriented—good mothers, wives and teachers of children—by studying those "saints" of a womb-oriented society two or three thousand years ago.

To bring the church into this century, and vitalize its mission as a liberating force for those who are oppressed, the church needs to move to liberate itself from the "womb" concept of women. The power of women has been recognized, but only as a subservient group and not as equals.

Women in the world are seeking careers and opportunities to participate in political and economic life, where they can have real influence. The conflict and power struggles in the world are also factors present within the church. Just as women are no longer satisfied with inferior positions or restricted lives outside the church, so they are moving to desire more status and participation in political and economic life inside the church. Yet this participation is met with scorn by many men *and* women who view the subjugation of women as "natural" because it is there.

"Ladies' classes" are often naive about the real needs of the church's mission in today's world. Women who are aware are often alienated from the ladies' groups, because of the policies and practices of the preachers—and older women—who run them. Today's involved generation of women is not content to be segregated, to be put in their "proper place" provided by the church. But some women may themselves be critical and condemn individual women who seek new ways to serve and minister beyond the church itself in the world.

Because of this, many women are missing from church groups. They include single women in large numbers, working women, younger college graduates, women who may send their children to classes but do not feel comfortable in the "circle," blacks or other minority or newcomer groups.

The refocusing of these woman's groups to communicate about significant ideas and actions is necessary. Discussion of children and family life is legitimate and important, but must become less sentimental and moralistic. Practical, real problems facing children and parents in the urban and suburban world must be discussed and acted upon. Church mothers from both worlds would benefit from sharing their mutual concerns, both problems and solutions. This would inevitably bring involvement in civil rights, housing, education, politics and employment. "Motherhood and family" would encompass more concern for children and families everywhere rather than dwelling only within the narrow confines of one's own personal, selfish prejudices.

The real problems of cleanliness and pleasant physical surroundings might be extended to include a concern for participation in demands for better city services by sanitation departments, rat extermination, and ecological cleanup involving local leadership of the community.

"Ladies' classes" need to honestly ask themselves what they are and are not doing. Devotionals and studies of "The Great Women of the Bible" are good, but they are hollow if we never get on to important situations where action is vital to reconciling human beings to each other and to God. We need to free ourselves from mental shackles that bind more than fifty per cent of the church to ineffective, passive, alienated lives. □

A LOOK AT RELIGIOUS JOURNALISM

LESLIE LEONARD

Rawlins, Wyoming

Crocodile tears are being shed over the increased number of publications being circulated among the churches of Christ. Many brethren, if it were possible, would restrict this practice, since they realize that the motive for starting some of the ventures is to teach things they don't agree with.

I, for one, welcome these new ventures, believing that truth has nothing to fear when there is an open examination of any and all opinions.

An understanding of the unique nature of religious publications will help us to see the need for many magazines.

Religious journals do not exist primarily for monetary gain. Their primary purpose is to propagate the doctrines, beliefs, and practices of a particular religious group. This distinct purpose tends to restrict, and even distort, the editorial content of the journal. It would be better for all sides of an argument to be presented, but that is almost impossible because of predisposition of editors and writers.

Each journal has its own peculiar area. Some are dedicated to preserving past traditions and will not consider questioning "acceptable standards" or examining new ideas. Some emphasize a special doctrine or practice. Others are devoted to a particular sub-

ject and attempt to filter Christianity through their understanding of that one subject.

There are some benefits to be derived from this diversity. Just a few publications can cover one particular belief, but not all the various beliefs and practices—and there is great variety of opinion in the brotherhood. A limited number of publications can discuss all our beliefs only when we reach a point where there is no need for improvement, where there is no need to be challenged, or where there is an overall authority to lay down rules as to what is to be published. Of course Christ has this authority, but until men accept his pronouncements—or at least understand them—we will have a variety of ideas.

Another benefit derived from having many publications is the opportunity to get different ideas considered. Especially ideas which, although they may be scriptural, are not in harmony with the commonly held opinions. Of course those who believe there are no truths to be discovered, or feel that we cannot improve, will not agree with this.

Each group in the church has its own paper that labors to convince the members of that group that they are the “loyal church,” and that they are blessed above all other groups.

The purpose of religious papers was expressed by the editor of *The Exhorter* in the December 1968 issue, as he tried to determine the feasibility of keeping that paper alive. “How effective are these papers?” he wrote. “No one knows. Generally speaking the only one who subscribes are those whose viewpoint harmonizes with that of the paper, so to some extent both the writers and readers are looking into a mirror to see their own ideas coming back to them.” Religious papers, then, tend to tell a group what they

already believe. This limits the writers and editors.

Anyone who writes for “church papers” soon learns he is restricted in what he can write. He realizes it is futile to write on a subject that the editor, or the subscribers, will not agree with. Writers of secular magazines must determine the attitude and beliefs of the editor. The writers then slant their material; not because they are dishonest, but because they know it is a waste of time to submit material to an editor who serves a readership with different ideas. This is also true of religious magazines.

Add to this the fact that the religious writer has to be careful not to write anything that will brand him as belonging to a particular sect—which would cause him to be virtually blacklisted—and it is a wonder that anything is written.

Freedom to publish is desirable and should be encouraged. Church papers play an important part in developing and guiding us. It is upon church papers as an anvil that we beat out our basic understanding of the scripture.

The old well-established papers will continue to act as defenders of past practices; but if we become mired in tradition, they will not be inclined to question our situation. We need ways for questions to be heard and discussed, and that will only be possible through new mediums of communication.

Let’s be frank. We would all like, at times, to limit the avenues of communication of those who don’t agree with us. But it is possible that we can learn if we will just listen. We should have the attitude of Gamaliel: “If this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” (Acts 5). □

FROM THE EDITOR

ESTABLISHING THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

While reading Ken Taylor’s delightful paraphrase of Isaiah the other night I came across the following:

“Come,” they say. “We’ll get some wine and have a party; let’s all get drunk. This is really living; let it go on and on, and tomorrow will be better yet!”

What can one say to people like that? Obviously they are satisfied with the present and optimistic about the future. But are they right? It is important that we be able to discern the times. Some always look on the dark side. They think the difference between the optimist and the pessimist is that the pessimist is better informed. But others, just as mistakenly, can see no danger. The prophet speaks of the latter.

Francis Schaeffer in *Death in the City* raises the question of what one should do if he met a really modern man on the train and had only one hour to talk with him about the gospel. Schaeffer’s approach would be to spend 45 to 50 minutes of the hour on the negative and then take 10 or 15 minutes to preach the gospel. He insists that we overemphasize the positive. He has a good argument. Perhaps we would be more convincing if our message was $\frac{3}{4}$ bad news and $\frac{1}{4}$ good news.

We have been concerned that so many of the manuscripts submitted to *Integrity* were too negative. Although there is much to be

against, writing that is mostly negative turns people off. It is too depressing. We need to draw attention to the glorious work of God in this world and to his amazing grace which has made, is making, and will make so many free. And yet we wonder what Jeremiah or Isaiah would say if they wrote an article for our readers. □

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

One of our advisors, whose opinions we respect, said that he would like to see more articles that arouse nagging questions and complained that too many authors are overly concerned with leaving the reader with pat answers that can be filed away and ready for use should that question ever arise again. In fact, he wondered what would be the response if some journal concerned itself wholly with raising relevant, probing questions without necessarily trying to give answers. He went on to visualize “a great surge of interest on the part of many who have not entertained a perplexing question in years.”

Well, our friend is certainly unusual: he likes to think. And although no journal that hopes to have wide circulation would be well advised to focus on so rare an individual, we think Pam Kemp’s article in this issue is at

least a bold step in that direction. If the secret of successful journalism is to have something in each issue that makes each reader feel he should not have missed it, we may expect our friend to be numbered among the faithful for at least another month! □

SUFFERING THROUGH THE MAIL

One of the advantages of our work is that we get to read a lot of interesting mail. A favorite time for reading is during lunch, which is not always good for marital relations, not to speak of digestion. And some letters are a real emotional drag.

A few weeks ago I received a letter from Stan Paregien in which he included a report concerning his change of profession and fellowship. The reasons behind Stan's change were stated in his article in last month's issue. We chose to print it without comment, but now I want to comment.

After reading a few lines of Stan's letter, I decided to share it with my wife. But I couldn't read it. I got all choked up and had to quit after a few sentences.

Until recently our brother ministered to what is reported to be the largest Church of Christ in Oklahoma. I do not personally know that congregation, but I am sure that it is composed of good, sincere Christians who want to serve the Lord. But they are a part of a larger communion which has in recent years grown increasingly intolerant of doctrinal deviations. These deviations have nothing to do with the fundamentals of the Christian faith. They are rather related to questions which are not even asked in the New Testament. But one's future in the fellowship often depends upon giving the right answers to them—and sometimes upon ask-

ing the right questions!

Many of our thoughtful (and not always young) preachers are asking the wrong questions. They soon find that, even if they are tolerated, they are not trusted. They are under terrific pressure to become hypocrites and keep their convictions to themselves. Doors begin to close, and fellowship shrinks. They begin to hunger to be themselves in Christ. Finally, if they are not kicked out, they voluntarily move to a more congenial climate.

I do not weep for these men. Invariably they are happier as a result of their pilgrimage. But I do weep for a brotherhood that spurns so many capable, dedicated servants who cannot be sectarians. I weep for the churches who are so fearful of digression that they will not employ ministers with the best training simply because they equate graduate degrees with doctrinal degeneration. I weep for Christians who cannot be free enough to let their brothers be free and God be God, and who can't quite be content to "not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes," even though it is hard for them to "kick against the goads."

Sometimes reading the mail can be a real emotional experience. □

GRACE FOR THE DISGRACED

Senator Eagleton's short career as a vice-presidential candidate reminds us that our nation still lacks understanding of mental health problems. That one's medical history might make him incapable of assuming the responsibility of the presidency is, of course, a legitimate concern. But it is also tragic that so many of us are still distrustful of any person who has ever been mentally ill.

Some time ago two preacher friends told me of their disturbing encounter with a mutual friend who had spent much of the past several years in mental hospitals. Although at each confinement he had been diagnosed as a manic depressive (a psychotic reaction, one of the severest forms of disorganization) my friends thought his antisocial behavior warranted a sound whipping! Even if only a very few of our preachers have this attitude, the mentally ill will suffer much at their hands.

I am aware that some do not believe in mental illness, and it is not my purpose to settle that argument here. But I do want to register a protest against those who equate behavior which is symptomatic of personality disorganization with calculated meanness. Whether the answer to these problems lies in exorcism, psychoanalysis, behavioral psychology, or something else, those who are afflicted need understanding rather than stigmatization. What they do not need is to be forced by their ignorant friends to go into hiding with their affliction. This is another instance where Christians need to administer more grace and less disgrace. □

LOVE LOST

It happened a few years ago, but the incident is not easy to forget. A gloomy teenage girl, obviously pregnant, came into my office and asked if she could speak with me. I knew her family. Her mother had spent most of her adult life in a mental institution, and her father was hardly a paragon of virtue. She had yielded to a young man who had promised to marry her but had vanished. Her request was simple: all she wanted was for me to assure her that she had permission to attend our church services.

I thought of another young girl, a high school junior who during a basketball tournament had spent a couple of nights in a motel with the coach, a man over twice her age. When she came back to school (to clean out her locker), nobody spoke to her. Although the bus was crowded, she had a seat all to herself, where she sat staring at a book and feigning indifference. That is one day I would like to have to live over.

I thought of Jesus and how so many bad characters flocked around him, and how he was criticized because of the company he kept. Sinners (a term which is used in the gospels to include harlots) loved him, and he loved them. But the religious leaders were horrified at that relationship.

Then I wondered why we do not attract such people as Jesus did. The answer which came to me is not one of my most pleasant revelations, but it must be true: we simply have not shown the love that Jesus showed. On that historic day when he entered Jerusalem "the whole city went wild with excitement." There were undoubtedly various reasons for this, but one I am sure of is that people felt his love.

Some young men in my area have made wonderful rescues by taking their Bibles and going into the local bars to evangelize. But they have been able to do this only by resisting the will of their church leaders. It reminds me of Jesus and the Pharisees.

Of course, it may be said that those who shy away from us are just reflecting their own guilt feelings. But that would also have been true in Jesus' time. It is far more likely that we do not have the love of Jesus, who died for us *while we were yet sinners*.

Some of us will soothe ourselves with the argument that we must protect our reputation. If that is the case, I suspect we overestimate how much we have to protect. □