

Integrity

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HOMECOMING

Amid the black chaos of strife and division
I came to myself.
The murky cloud of arrogance, ignorance and self-love lifted
Until I felt my intense need.
My dim eyes strained to focus, only to see that I was dying
From husks of a system that I had helped to perpetuate.

*Dear Lord God in Heaven, forgive me my blindness!
Permit me to be your servant;
Feed me of your bread;
Give me to drink of the water of life;
Clothe my nakedness with the mantle of your grace;
Warm my cold heart with your love.*

In loving kindness He greeted me, welcoming me home
With outstretched arms of salvation,
Not as a servant, but as His child.
My every lack was filled to overflowing
From His abundant mercy until I knew
No hunger, no thirst, no nakedness, no cold.

Suddenly, a dagger of doubt threatened to pierce my joy
As I looked into the angry eyes of my brother.
His condemnation engulfed me with false guilt,
And I fearfully began to recede into the far country
As I sank to my knees in despairing sorrow,
Unable to communicate my love.

But my Father gently lifted me up, steadying me until
My eyes rested only on Him, dispelling my uncertainty and
Replenishing my wavering faith with the power of His love.
Confidently I met the stare of condemnation with His strength,
Silently pleading that my brother would also come to himself
And share in eternal life.

—PATRICIA ALLBRITTEN

Maintaining the Spirit's Work

HOY LEDBETTER

The Bible charges us to “spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives.” Although we cannot produce unity ourselves—it is something the Spirit gives—its maintenance requires serious effort on our part. One of several passages telling us how to meet our responsibility is Colossians 3:12-15, an exposition of which follows.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved . . .

It is vital for the Christian to meditate frequently on the fact that his status is due to God's choosing him. He is one of God's saints, the object of his tender love. This truth not only requires us to behave like him, but a full acceptance of it will actually *inspire* us to do so.

compassion . . .

I used to tell myself I could not afford to become emotionally involved with people who came to me in trouble, that unless I maintained a professional aloofness from their agonies I would become unbearably depressed. Actually I was imitating the ancient Stoics (who trained themselves to be incapable of feeling) more than Jesus, whose sensibility to and loving concern for his people is often denoted by the word “compassion.” No convert from paganism could fail to marvel at his compassion on the crowds that followed him, the people he healed, and particularly the grieving widow of Nain. Emotional involvement also recurs in his

parables. The Samaritan who took upon himself the suffering of the wounded man on the Jericho road, the forgiving master of the hopelessly indebted servant, and the tenderly affectionate father of the prodigal son are embodiments of compassion.

When Paul sent Onesimus back to his master, he said, “I am sending him back to you, sending my very *heart*” (Phile. 12). He also told the Philippians, “I yearn after you all with the *affection* of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:8). In both instances (note italics) he uses the Greek word for compassion. He had caught the disposition of Jesus to become emotionally involved with people.

But I suspect that many today are more Stoic than Christian: we shun emotional involvement. One reason is the cost. Compassion requires us to help our brother in need, and the expense may exceed our generosity. However, in a society where welfare programs are fairly efficient, this may not be the best test. Our avoidance of emotional involvement may be more a self-protective measure against the hostility, hypocrisy, and indifference of others by which we have been hurt in the past. Lest we be hurt again, we refuse to become deeply involved with people. This problem strikes at the very heart of fellowship, for the depth of our emotional involvement is a measure of our communion.

Real fellowship entails risks. It means we suffer with sufferers and weep with weepers, that separation from our brothers is giving up our very hearts. When we deny ourselves

the blessing of intimacy, we may escape the disappointments of the past, but we rob ourselves of the one thing most of us need more than anything else.

kindness . . .

A few years ago my wife and I walked out while a brother was preaching. I have suffered through many abusive sermons, but his was so uniquely slanderous I wondered at the latent maliciousness of those who encouraged him. But much preaching, writing, and religious discussion is hard to take, which is to say that it is unkind.

When Jesus said, "My yoke is easy [lit. kind]," he meant that it is easy to wear, that it makes life's burdens easier to take. When he said, "The old [wine] is good [kind]," he meant it is pleasant, mellow, without harshness or bitterness. The words and deeds of the kind person are easy to take, pleasant, mellow.

Some acts of helpfulness are not as helpful as we think. One who asks us for a favor already occupies the unpleasant position of a beggar. We only add to his misery when we give aid coldly. Alexander Maclaren truly said, "Much is said about ingratitude, but very often it is but the instinctive recoil of the heart from the unkind doer of a kindness. Aid flung to a man as a bone is to a dog usually gets as much gratitude as the sympathy which it expresses deserves." We have failed to be kind if our action or message lacks any of the following: friendliness, generosity, helpfulness, warmheartedness, thoughtfulness, and courtesy.

Our kindness does not depend on positive reaction from others; God, our pattern, "is kind to the ungrateful and selfish." But 1 Peter 2:1-3 particularly relates his attitude to unity, since it suggests that tasting "the kindness of the Lord" enables us to cast off

those sins which thwart Christian fellowship: ill-feeling, pretence and underhand dealing, saying what we do not mean and not meaning what we say, discontent at another's prosperity, and every kind of abusive speech. Knowing his concern and sympathy for us makes it possible for us to feel as he does about others.

lowliness . . .

Young preachers soon learn that a good way to get your own back patted is to pat someone else's; that is, the most compliments come from telling people what they already know. Sermons that support the boast "we have the truth" will please some people far more than what they really need to hear. Of course, in a way they need them, since they hunger for being told how right they are and how wrong others are.

There is too much comparing ourselves with others—in a way intended to make us look better. This tendency of looking down our noses at our brothers hardly prepares us for listening to and learning from them. In the Holy Spirit controversy, for example, we have witnessed a great deal of arrogance on both sides. If the Lord came down to get involved in this issue, I suspect he would begin by washing our feet. We seem to ignore the fact that arrogance always repels and humility always attracts.

Humility is the antidote to our divisive power struggles. Peter tells the elders and then others: "Do not try to rule over those who have been given to your care . . . you younger men must submit yourselves to the older men . . . all of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another" (1 Pet. 5:3-6). But what is humility? According to Philippians 2:3-4, it is putting ourselves *lowest* and *last*. We must think more highly of the merits of others ("in humility

count others better than yourselves"), and of the wants and interests of others before our own ("let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others").

It is good to have confidence in our convictions, but it is sinful to want to put ourselves first, to think that we can dictate to others, and to suppose that there is nothing *important* left for us to learn.

meekness . . .

A manufacturer of piston rings used to advertise with the slogan "Tough but O So Gentle"—which is a very good definition of meekness. The Greek word is hard to translate; Arndt and Gingrich suggest "*gentleness, humility, courtesy, consideration, meekness* in the older favorable sense." Aristotle defined it as the mean between too much and too little anger. It is used of horses brought under control and therefore "gentle." We may say a meek man is a controlled man who is still tough.

Meekness can easily be confused with softness (which may be why the *Gospel Guardian* is under attack for its moderation). The Hauck/Schulz discussion touches on this confusion: "Paul had full reason to inveigh against the Corinthians on account of their disputatiousness and arrogance, but they would not make it impossible for him to bring the gentleness of Christ to bear against them, 2 C. 10:1. This meekness has its basis in agape and it cannot therefore think in terms of harsh punishment even in relation to the disobedient, 1 C. 4:21. There can be no question of this course of action on the apostle's part being branded as softness or weakness, for it rests on the gentleness and love which Christ exemplified for the community during His life on earth" (*TDNT*, VI, 650).

Meekness is a vital deterrent to division over doctrinal disputes, since "the servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome, but kindly towards all. He should be a good teacher, tolerant, and gentle when discipline is needed for the refractory. The Lord may grant them a change of heart and show them the truth" (2 Tim. 2:23-25). As C.K. Barrett notes, we "must tread the narrow path between acquiescence in error, and too violent a rejection of it . . . in some circumstances it is possible for the orthodox to become as foolish as their opponents. . . . Those who are in error will not reach the truth simply by study and teaching. The teacher's work becomes effective only if God grants *them a change of heart*." The New Testament shows a leniency toward those in error which, in the light of modern sectarianism, is amazing.

James flips the coin, telling the learner to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (1:21). The context suggests a readiness to be taught without becoming angered with the teacher.

To sum up: "It is when we have *prautes* [meekness] that we treat all men with perfect courtesy, that we can rebuke without rancour, that we can argue without intolerance, that we can face the truth without resentment, that we can be angry and yet sin not, that we can be gentle and yet not weak" (William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, 121).

and patience . . .

Jonah blew up at a long-tempered God who chose to spare the Ninevites, but he was hardly the last person to become unhappy over people being reconciled to God. There is a frustration within many of us which requires us to find some scapegoat upon whom we can place the burden of the "whole mess" (*whatever* it is) and drive out into the wilderness. We may disguise our hostilities

in various ways, but our fights are not always fights for truth; they are rewards in themselves. If there was none to fight, we would be miserable.

Perhaps I am meeting the wrong people, but there seems to be an increasing amount of cynicism today. Sometimes I think I would not be surprised to find a modern Diogenes, dressed in a barrel and walking around in daylight with a lantern in his hand looking for a good man. The cynic believes all men are motivated by selfishness. The Watergate mess has encouraged cynicism on a national level, although far more damaging to some is the hurt they have received from hypocrisy and indifference among church members from whom they expected much more.

Patience (*makrothumia*: a long temper) is the remedy for such hostility and cynicism. It enables us to wait on God, to keep from giving up on people and lashing out. It is interesting that in 2 Corinthians 6:6 patience is mentioned between *knowledge* and *kindness*, suggesting that it springs from a good understanding of the other fellow's situation under God and issues in a friendly attitude toward him. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant shows us how much God bears with us. Surely if we cannot bear with others, we do not properly appreciate what he has done for us.

forbearing one another . . .

Our restoration fathers would be amazed to see how some churches today have concentrated their fears in a long list of intolerable beliefs, even to the point of developing highly restrictive creeds and demanding that functionaries sign statements of belief that include party peculiarities down to the last minutia, and forcing those who cannot spontaneously conform to either lie or face ex-

pulsion. But the problem is broader than a few such churches. If we were to try—as we should—to justify, on solid Biblical grounds rather than denominational habit, any limitation on our intimate involvement with our neighbor who happens to belong to another church, we would likely find our reasons for isolation less scriptural than we thought.

As a matter of fact the religious affiliation of most of us is more an accident than the result of serious study. That is, we did not examine all the churches by the Bible and then choose the right one—we just responded to the most appealing of those whom we happened to meet. The idea that the typical church member is such because he is highly selective and astutely studious is a myth.

Forbearance—the “taking to oneself of one's neighbor in the sense of tolerating his life”—in this context means that we apply to one another the election which is ours in Christ. It is a challenge to broaden our view of who the Lord's people are, the answer to the ever-shrinking circle of fellowship in some communions.

and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. . . .

Any group that includes very many who feel inordinately lonely and guilty is a potential trouble spot, since knowing God's love and forgiveness is necessary to loving and forgiving others. Forgiveness is the point of contact between God's grace and man's sin; and we cannot be vehicles of his grace unless we have really felt its force in our own lives. If the early church was more dynamic than we are, it was because they knew in their hearts they had been forgiven. Without this motive for forgiveness, we are bound to have constant trouble. If we are to recapture the

love of the early Christians and the concomitant fellowship, we must experience their elation over being forgiven. The joy of forgiveness works two ways. On the one hand is the joy of being forgiven. On the other is the joy of escaping the shackles of bitterness and resentment by forgiving others. People who know such joy are good prospects for living in unity.

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. . . .

Some time ago I received a letter stating that I was being disfellowshipped because of some points of view I hold. It was signed by some people I could not recall meeting. I responded with the suggestion that they might know something I did not and that we should meet and talk over our differences. I never received a reply. One cannot take such “disfellowshipping” very seriously, for it shows little evidence of the love “which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Such an approach makes a farce out of excommunication, not just because of insufficient grounds, but, more important, because it reflects a lack of the love upon which fellowship is based. Those brothers never withdrew anything from me, because they had never extended anything to me.

There is a kind of love which divides the body rather than uniting it. The Pharisees, loving the chief seats in the synagogues and other marks of distinction, felt threatened by Jesus and tried to obstruct his progress. The Jewish authorities, loving the praise of men, were afraid to confess their faith in Christ, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. Diotrephes, loving to put himself first, dictated to the church that they should not be hospitable to the missionaries whom he did not accept. Demas, loving this

world, deserted Paul in the Roman prison.

Such misdirected love is reflected in numerous ruptures of fellowship today. We still see those who love their positions of eminence too much to allow others to rise unchallenged in popularity. There are still believers too fond of the opinion of mistaken church leaders to reveal their true convictions, lest they be removed from the church directory. We yet encounter would-be leaders who believe they have every right to dictate to the whole church whom they can receive. And there are still with us ministers whose attachment to the world permits them to leave their fellow ministers in the lurch.

But Christian love—unconquerable good will toward men and God—is the conjunction which binds together the members of the community and thus brings unity and perfection. It not only lifts us above the aforementioned sins, but it enables us to maintain the truth in such a way that others are drawn to it. “Speaking the truth in love” is more than verbal communication; it is literally “truthing in love” (which is impossible to render in English because we lack the verb). Our ministry must never be unsympathetic, forgetting persons in a quest for correct doctrine. Churches rarely divide over doctrine; doctrinal disputes are merely symptoms of inability to love. Love and truth go hand in hand, and most people prefer love without truth to truth without love. Let's see that they never have to make such a choice.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. . . .

We were called to the realm of peace, with which we have heart ties. The body is one: there should be no conflict of interest. All our decisions must be determined by the domain to which we belong, for when it

dictates our decisions, we will have right relationships in all directions. But it is possible for us to pollute our spiritual environment with corrupt theology resulting in something less than peace among ourselves. If the theology we hold tends to divide us, we should examine our doctrinal foundations; for we have enough trouble living harmoniously without following a rule of faith and practice which is essentially divisive.

And be thankful. . . .

Thanksgiving is related to unity in two ways. If we turn our thoughts to God, we

can be delivered from self-pity (the breeder of resentment and bitterness), and from the self-inflated attitude which causes us to look down on others (since all our gifts come from Him). Incidentally, many of the qualities which we think make us better than others really do not at all, for skin color, sex, I.Q., and to a certain extent money and education are gifts we have received. On the other hand, if thanksgiving focuses on men, we will look in them for grounds of gratitude, rather than occasions of injury. By thus being thankful we will be more harmonious. □

A Taste of the Light

I saw nothing but darkness in the night sky above—nothing except for one tiny pinhead of light far, far away.

I shut my eyes, and thought of everything else.

Then, I became curious; I had to know if that pinhead was still out there.

I opened my eyes; it was still waiting for me. I stared back at it.

It grew. Silently, slowly it filled the entire sky. I was troubled, and again I closed my eyes, and thought of nothing.

But once more I wondered if it was still shining. I opened my eyes, and it was waiting for me.

Now, it began to shine more brightly, more intensely.

And I understood. It wanted to engulf my entire body. I let it come; it felt warm, peaceful.

But then I understood more fully. It wanted to penetrate through my eyes, into my mind; to completely move everything else out of my mind, and shine clear through me.

I did not want this. I shut my eyes, and closed it off.

But I still felt it around me, trying to come in somewhere else. But it could only reach my mind through my eyes, and I kept them shut.

How long have I kept them shut! How long have I refused entrance!

The light is still around me; it will not let me go.

It offers to light up my life, to show me the way; but I keep my eyes closed, and will not let it come in.

So it is just waiting for me; it refuses to open my eyes itself; it is just waiting for me.

And my mind tells my eyes to open, for it will be pure, exquisite joy; my passion and pride push my eyes shut, for the light would purge me of them. It would shine through, and leave no room for anything else.

It's waiting for me; it'll never leave. And I can't run from it; I've had a taste of the light, and that will never fade.

—DAVID MOODY

SELECTED SHORT SUBJECTS

IT'S NOT EASY BEING A KID

DAVID ELKINS

Bridgeport, Connecticut

It's not easy being a kid. For one thing, people don't pay any attention to you. Saturday I went to buy new sneakers. The shoe salesman waited on three adults before he finally noticed me and gave me my turn. Then yesterday the kids at school made fun of my new sneakers—because they were purple. When I got home, I was almost crying. I tried to tell Mom and Dad about it, but they just laughed. I felt all alone and sadlike. So I went out on the front porch and talked to my dog. My dog always pays attention to me. He gets real quiet and just listens. Sometimes he whines a little and licks my hand. Dogs understand kids—at least better than grown-ups.

It's not easy being a kid. Everybody expects you to be perfect even when they aren't. Like, if I break a promise, I get punished. But last summer Dad promised to take me on a weekend fishing trip and then changed his mind—and he never got punished. In fact, he yelled at me because I got mad and called him a "promise-breaker."

When you're a kid, everybody expects you to show respect for grown-ups. "Yes sir," "No sir," "Mister Wells." You always have to be polite and never call adults by their first names. So many rules to learn in order to be a proper kid! Sometimes I get pretty tired of all this polite stuff. Like the

day I went to Bill Johnson's birthday party. It was really a dumb party. There were ten kids and eight adults. Mrs. Johnson kept making us play silly baby games. When it was over, I didn't tell her I had a nice time because I didn't. But when I got home, Mom made me call her up and tell her that I did—and apologize because I "forgot."

It's not easy being a kid. Boy, sometimes I just wish grown-ups had to be kids for one day. "Do this!" "Do that!" "Don't interrupt!" "Eat your food!" "Clean up that room!" "Turn that TV down!" "Wipe that frown off!" If they had to listen to all that even for one day, they'd go crazy. Dad gets all nervous when his boss says one thing to him. I get this kind of stuff all day, every day. Sometimes I think us kids are stronger than grown-ups.

Lots of times I go to my bedroom and play a make-believe game in my head. It's always the same. I pretend that I'm a scientist and make a giant bomb that will kill only grown-ups. Then I call all the grown-ups in the whole world together and make a speech.

I say, "Look here, you grown-ups. I've got this bomb and I'm going to set it off if you don't listen and do as I say. Us kids are sick and tired of the way you've been treating us. You boss us around, punish us, and hit us. You laugh at us and tease us. You never take us serious or act like we count. You never listen to us or act like what we say is important. And we demand a change."

Then all the grown-ups start crying and beg me not to blow them up. Mom and Dad come up and get on their knees in front of me. They cry and say they're sorry. Then I cry too and say I'm not really going to blow them up. Dad hugs me and Mom kisses me. All the grown-ups of the world cheer and promise to be good to kids from then on . . .

Always, after I play this make-believe game, I feel real sad. So usually I just go out on the front porch and talk to my dog.

Like I say, it's not easy being a kid. □

GOD'S STAND ON HOMOSEXUALITY

PENNY HOLDEN
San Diego, California

The first mention of homosexuals in the Bible is in Genesis 19, with the men of Sodom who tried to seduce the two male angels of the Lord who were visiting Lot. The next main mention is in the Law of Moses, which was given Moses by God. Leviticus 18:22 states: "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination." And even more specifically, in Leviticus 20:13: "If a man lies with a male as if he were a woman, both men have committed an offense—perverse, unnatural, abhorrent and detestable; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Amplified Bible).

In the New Testament, Paul mentions homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. "Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled); neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, nor cheats—swindlers and thieves, nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God." Here homosexuality is listed along with other sins. It is not classified as a "sickness." If all of these sins are sicknesses, then surely mental illness would

have been listed among them. The fact that mental illness and homosexuality are not classified together, but instead that homosexuality is listed in with wrongdoings, unlawful and sinful acts, shows that God does not consider it a sickness. God is indeed a just God. "Is it possible that an enemy of right should govern? And will you condemn Him Who is just and mighty?" (Job 34:17). God would not condemn homosexuality if it was, or is, a sickness, for he does not condemn the mentally retarded, who have no choice. Homosexuality can be controlled, but somewhere along the line the homosexual has chosen his road—just as murderers decide to murder, liars decide to lie, and robbers choose to steal. □

HE LEADS ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

DWYATT GANTT
Toronto, Ontario

The other morning as I was waiting for the bus to go to work, I was praying for Mary. Mary is a 20 year old, one of three precious girls and a boy who call me "Dad." She had just returned from third year university and was going out that day to look for a summer job. "Lord," I heard myself saying, "lead her in the paths of righteousness—for your name's sake." I hadn't planned to say it—it was just one of those beautiful spontaneities that the Holy Spirit gives us as he "goes to meet our supplication." Just for one beautiful moment I saw the deep, mysterious, and wonderful workings of God. I felt deep relief as I sensed God's loving hold on Mary to guide her in the paths of righteousness.

There are so many paths in this twisted

wreckage of a world. And along those paths are strewn what remain of bright lives and golden dreams—shattered, broken, and full of regrets. Paths to drug addiction, broken marriages, blighted hopes, and a thousand other all-too-real tragedies that lie in wait.

A week ago I became a grandfather. My oldest daughter and son-in-law had the good grace to become parents of a beautiful baby girl. We were all thrilled and excited, of course, but in the midst of seeing this newborn babe, I was deeply aware of a sudden flush of reality that *here* was a new creature—a child of the world, a member of the human race, a divine creation of God having a spirit and soul. And just for a moment, fear filled me! The world is an increasingly dangerous place to live. A wilderness filled with roaring lions seeking whom they may devour—and they thrive on the young. But fear was displaced by the faith that says this lovely little lamb will be led by the Shepherd—led in paths of righteousness. I praise God for his reassuring presence and precious promises.

I don't know about you, but I long to be led by the Lord. How can one get through the tangled roads of life with mere head knowledge? What do I say to my son finishing high school about a career? How can I know what lies down all those paths of possibilities open before him? One of them is a God-marked path that leads to the highest purpose—God's plan for his life.

There was a time when I was afraid of that path. Might not a stern God take you into grinding misery? His grace has taught me that the chastisement of a loving Father is administered to keep us on the paths of righteousness, but they lead to green pastures, still waters, restoring of soul, freedom from fear even of death, comfort, a bountiful table, anointing with oil, and a brimming

cup running over. On that path surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives and we shall live in the house of the Lord forever. □

A PRAYER

ALLEN HOLDEN, Jr.
San Diego, California

You must have really had a ball when you made this world, Father. I was out walking around the other day, and I couldn't get over how *beautiful* everything was. I'm sure you could have made everything just as *functional* without it being so downright gorgeous. Is it really necessary for the birds to sing in such a refreshing manner? I'm sure you could have found a way for the trees to drop their leaves without going through the transition from green to yellow, red, purple and brown. And what happens to the sky when the sun sets—unreal!

But there's one thing I've wondered about, Lord. Why did it take you so long to make everything? You had the power to just speak all this into existence in an instant—why did you spend *six days*? What did you do all that time? Did you smell the roses that you made? You know how I love to sit and stare at the ocean as the waves come rolling in to shore—did you do that too? I know that you walked around in the garden "in the cool of the day" when Adam and Eve lived there—did you do that during that first week also?

Every time I feel the warm sun on me, stare at a tree, or walk in that canyon with the fabulous eucalyptus trees, right in the middle of town, it blows my mind! I am convinced now that you put all this splendor here for a purpose. Thanks, Father. □

A Simple Touch

CRAIG M. WATTS

Flint, Michigan

Despite the new trends in psychology, for some reason we seem terrified of a touch. Apart from sexual contact, that has overly fascinated our culture, touch is limited to an accidental brush of shoulders, or at best, a firm handshake. But where possible it is completely avoided.

The hesitancy to touch another human being is too often far more than physical withdrawal. It is a visual demonstration of social alienation. The fear of bodies meeting is the external result of the fear of having minds, hearts, souls and unveiled personalities meeting and sharing each other. Those who shrink from a touch sometimes are actually shrinking from having their real inadequate selves revealed. For them the touch is a threat, an enemy, and must be treated as such. Let me offer an example of this attitude.

Setting Fred Free . . .

Several years ago I met a young man (let's call him Fred) who, because of some extremely destructive and hypocritical actions he experienced in a number of church leaders, became bitter and cold. Fred came to believe the love of Christ to be a farce and compassion nonexistent. For after his dad had a serious accident that some influential churchmen were connected with, Fred saw them turn their backs on him, though they had promised to help. Ignoring the state-

ment of doctors, whose view was to the contrary, they told Fred's dad he could help himself if he wanted to.

I've sat and talked with Fred and watched him tremble with anger as he related these past experiences. Screaming and swearing, he would speak of revenge. At times he would just break down and cry. He felt alone, unloved and unloving.

Fred found that he could not pray. Once when he was attempting to explain his situation, a girl pleaded, "But Fred, try to pray." In response he cried loudly, "I can't!" When he tried, it seemed like a wasted effort. To him it was as if God refused to listen.

When Fred was present at a devotional one night, we all decided to pray for him. But this time we did something more. Gathering around Fred, we laid our hands on him and prayed fervently. Our hands represented the deep concern we felt and the desire to reach out to him.

After a short while the cold walls fell away—Fred began praying. He prayed with joy and fulness. Someone in the group spoke: "Fred, you know what you need to do now." So at that late hour he was baptized into Christ. When he was raised from the water, he sang out, "Now I can really smile!"

Not long afterwards I was speaking to a congregation about this conversion and the incidents that led up to it. I was shocked at the way a few of the people reacted. It

was obscene! There was a spirit of fear in the air. Accusations were thrown about. "Rebel! You just want to be different." And: "Don't try to deny it. You were trying to give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands."

And it was all because of a simple touch; a healing, helping touch.

There was a time when Christians weren't afraid to touch each other. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven (Acts 6:6), not in order to give the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts, but to ordain them. The prophets and teachers laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas before dismissing them for their missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). The Ephesian elders "wept and embraced Paul" before he left them (Acts 20:36-38). That the early church greeted one another with a kiss is supported by no fewer than five commands to do so (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14).

It appears that the biblical Christian was far more willing to display his feelings than we are. The difference between the early church and the contemporary church is not merely one of culture or custom. Their difference is rooted in their primary influence: the church today is too often primarily influenced by secular society, while the New Testament church found its example in Christ.

Our Lord realized the importance of a touch in a way that few today understand. In the gospels the word touch is always associated with Christ himself, except in one instance. The very fact that Christ came in the flesh emphasizes the importance of physical contact. "The Incarnation itself has been truly described in one of its aspects as God's coming into touch with men, or God's putting Himself where men can touch Him. St.

Paul says that men 'seek the Lord, if haply they may feel after [lit. "handle"] him' (Acts 17:27); and one purpose of the Incarnation is that in Christ this desire may be satisfied" (Hastings' *DCG*, II, p. 736).

Aspects of Christ's Touch . . .

The touch of love always has healing power in it, though it is not necessarily what we refer to as "supernatural" healing. If we dare limit the significance of the touch of Christ to the supernatural realm, we will strip most of the relevance away. There are at least four aspects of Christ's touch beyond the physical healing.

(1) The touch of Jesus was at times of the nature of a *challenge*. He challenged the faith of those around him. In Matthew 9 it is recorded that two blind men appealed to Jesus, crying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." Our Lord first questioned their faith in his ability to do as they asked. "Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith it will be done to you.'"

Though at times, it seems, Christ was able to heal regardless of the faith of the people, in this case he was making the healing dependent on his subject's faith. With his words and touch he challenged them to believe.

(2) With a touch Jesus showed his *friendly acceptance* of those around him. He put the little children on his lap. He held Peter, whose lack of faith caused him to sink into the water. It was the desire of the Lord to gather near to him all who would (Mt. 23:37).

(3) Yet, beyond mere acceptance, the touch of Christ pointed to his *identification with sinners*. He identified himself with the weaknesses of the flesh by coming to earth

"in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 3:3). By coming in the flesh he learned to "sympathize with our weaknesses" in that he became "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

From the beginning of his ministry, he identified himself with the sinful. When John the Baptist put his hands on Jesus and baptized him with "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk. 1:4), Jesus' actions were saying, "I am one of you. Though I do not share your sins, I will share the consequence of sin, and I will accept all obligation put upon sinners." So in living with this attitude he came to be known as the "friend of sinners."

(4) With a touch Jesus displayed himself as *the compassionate Christ*. Early in his ministry a leper came to him to be cleansed. "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him" (Mk. 1:41). Without difficulty the Lord could have healed this man without physically coming into contact with him. But the touch did more than cleanse the leprosy; with a touch Jesus said to this man something that people theretofore had avoided: "I truly care." Though contact with such a disease was distinctly forbidden by law (Lev. 13:46), Jesus stepped out, took a chance of becoming defiled himself in order to touch.

(5) With Jesus the touch was often *a sign of service*. The Suffering Servant Lord left an example for his disciples to follow when he took a towel, a basin of water, and began washing the disciples' feet. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater

than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (Jn. 13:14-17). By necessity real, personal service involves touch.

Why We Are Afraid . . .

What part does touch have in our ministry to one another today? It must be admitted that it has virtually no part at all. Naturally there are those who in fear reject all that is unfamiliar to them. And there are those who will claim that touching is "too emotional." But we must follow Jesus and ask ourselves, "Why are we afraid to touch? And of what benefit is it today?"

I suggest, in addition to the reason offered at the beginning of this article, that there are several other obvious reasons people are afraid of touching. *Many fear the reason behind the touch*. They do not want their faith challenged, nor do they have the courage to challenge the faith of another. They are unwilling to freely accept others. They do not care to be identified with sinners. They do not care to be compassionate, except at their own convenience. And they do not want to be a servant of the people. It is *meaningful* touching that people fear. If a touch had little significance beyond the physical contact, they would not be afraid.

The meaning that can be found in Jesus' touch can be conveyed by us as his followers. We must be as he was in acceptance and identification with sinners; with true concern and service we must act.

As we put our arms around each other, and as we hold our brothers' and sisters' hands in prayer, we know that we are walking in the steps of Jesus. We need not fear, but rejoice. For as we hold on to each other we can know that Christ is in us and among us. □

Letters

A Good Word

I believe that much good is accomplished through your journal which you know nothing about. I trust that you can believe this and be encouraged to carry on even in those times when it would be so easy to take the path of least resistance and cease to care.

It was a man and his journal that changed the course of my life. For all the world's wealth I would not turn back to walk again the sectarian path down which I once headed. Yet, I can easily see (and it causes me to tremble) that but for a chance word, a fortuitous (?) circumstance, a spur-of-the-moment decision, I might still be in the slave camp of partyism. Strange and wonderful are the ways of God!

May your journal prosper in the important struggle to promote love of truth to the exalted position it deserves. May you never hesitate to abandon previous positions when truth has outflanked them.

Huntsville, Alabama

JAMES LEDBETTER

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This seems a good place to give our thanks to Mr. Ledbetter (who unfortunately is no relation to me) and several others who have given us so much encouragement. Such sons of encouragement are valuable participants in our work. Little do they know how much they help!*

Demythologizing

It is indeed unfortunate that Rudolf Bultmann is now too old and ailing to rise up and welcome Cecil May, Jr., into the ranks of "demythologizers." One may suspect, of course, that Mr. May, like most students of the Bible, has *always* demythologized whenever he felt uncomfortable with the implications of a text. But that speculation may be left for Mr. May and his own con-

science; Mr. May's most recent essay, "Women and Prayer" (*Integrity*, May 1973), speaks for itself.

In attempting to refute the arguments of Norman Parks, Mr. May draws a distinction between Paul's admonition concerning veils for women and his prohibition of speech in the assembly for women. Mr. May is inclined to see the prohibition of speech for women as literal and normative, while rejecting the command to wear veils because, he says, "it is precisely because it is a custom of their culture that the veil is to be worn." Unfortunately for Mr. May's argument, this is not what the text says:

That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

That's right: *because of the angels*. I can find no mention in this text of any concern for Paul's contemporary culture or the custom of his time. He relates his command to wear veils to *theological* categories (cf. verses 3, 7, 10). In summing up the need for veils, Paul appeals to *nature* (verses 14-15), but nowhere does he mention veils in the context of culture or custom.

Mr. May's approach to this issue is typical of an interesting phenomenon. I have no idea what interest the angels may have had or may yet have in the uncovered heads of women. Yet Mr. May can dismiss Paul's concern for veils while leaping to enforce his concern for silence. In dismissing both veils and silence, Dr. Parks is, at least, consistent. The veils passage is difficult and, perhaps, arcane and embarrassing to modern eyes, but it is no more embarrassing than the passages commanding silence. Those who would enforce the one should certainly enforce the other.

Mr. May might do well to heed the advice of an old country woman I once knew: "People who live in glass houses should undress in the barn."

Dover, New Jersey

DON HAYMES

No Time to Waste

Please send me *Integrity* regularly. I'm eighty-one years old and I need to learn as fast as I can. I've been in the Lord's church a long time, but where I go they teach little and denounce a lot. I'm tired of hearing how right we are when we aren't right with Jesus.

California

NAME WITHHELD