

Integrity

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Integrity

INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

Editorial (Continued from page 18)

The two devils in the "Intercepted Correspondence" show us how exaggerated differences, fear, and self-righteousness contribute to a lack of love and consequently to the big and little wars going on in the world, in the church, and in our hearts.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love, because he first loved us." I John 4:18-19

Bruce Kilmer
Co-editor

***Thank you for your response to our fall appeal for your financial partnership in the ministry of *Integrity*. We are still short of our goal to raise enough support to publish three of the six issues of *Integrity* for 1991. The Board has committed itself to contribute enough to publish the other three issues. If you can help, please send your tax deductible contributions to: *Integrity*, 4051 S. Lincoln Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858.

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How Can We Love?

These past months have been the kind that try our spirits and our ability to love. We have watched terror and death rain down on Iraqis, Kuwaitis, Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, British, Saudis, French, and other nationalities. We have seen people protest the actions of their governments and we have seen others dance in patriotic fervor. Flags have been burned and raised. Through it all, I wonder what God has thought about His children. Has His concern been for the governments and boundaries, the countries and nationalities, and the races and skins? Or has He looked on the people He created, and has His heart been filled with pain, as it was in the days of Noah when He was grieved that He had made humankind?

When will we beat our swords into plowshares? When will our love extend beyond ourselves, our families, our church, our race, or our nation? We have difficulty loving those who are different. We stereotype them to make our hatred even easier. Americans stereotyped the Japanese in World War II, just as the Japanese stereotyped the Americans. Blacks and whites, stereotype each other. But do you think God stereotypes any of us? Or does He love each of us as His child?

As you read the articles in this month's issue, think about God's love for you. Remember He knows you by name and loves you personally. This is the key to peace in the world and the key to unity in the church. Not that we first love each other. This will come. But that we first believe that God loves us and accepts us.

John Eoff approaches this through his thoughts on "saving faith." Have we made faith into something where none of us can be sure of God's love for us? Laquita Higgs looks at faith from the perspective of living by faith. But the question is the same for salvation and for daily living: "Does God care?"

John Loftus and Hoy Ledbetter wrestle with acceptance of and love for those with whom we differ. Can we ever accept one another until we are sure God has accepted us?

A new writer to *Integrity*, Kathy Wyler treats us to a poem about Jesus' loving welcome to us.

(Continued on page 32)

Saving Faith

JOHN EOFF

Nothing is so universally accepted by the Christian world as the thought of salvation coming to a man because of his faith. This is true because it is stated so many times and in so many ways in the New Testament. It is irrefutable, practically unquestioned. Preachers and teachers for most, if not all, denominations teach this fact. It seems as though this fact should unite all denominations in a common cause, but such is not the case. There seems to be an equally widely divided opinion among "believers" as to just what is meant by faith. The conclusion of nearly all seems to be that faith, as we commonly use the word, cannot be what is meant by the inspired writers when they use it in relation to justification. Nearly all would qualify it as "saving faith" that is needed; and here the division floodgates open. The ideas that flow from this conclusion are unlimited and varied. This is how some dogmas on this subject develop.

Varied Understandings

One person will decide that faith in Jesus as the Son of God must imply faith in his teachings. This is well and good. However, in order to have faith in Jesus, one must show that faith by following his teachings. This sounds good, except in practice we find that Jesus' teachings on morality are perfect, and it is impossible for one to follow them completely. In order to have *anyone* saved under this theory, we must begin our rationalizing. From here we branch out in all directions. We may decide that following some of Jesus' most important teachings is what is necessary to have "saving faith," or we may decide that our attitude toward His teachings is what is really important in proving our "saving faith." We may decide that "saving faith" is a faith that would change our lives (cause repentance), that is, a

faith that produces good works, to some undecided degree, more abundantly than in our previous, unbelieving lives.

Another person will understand that Jesus delegated authority that is perpetuated through successors and unless he/she submits to the current successor, he/she is not possessor of the "saving faith."

Some contend that "saving faith" must imply obedience to Jesus through His apostles' teachings regarding the structure and conduct of his "church." Consequently, some actually transfer their faith more toward his "church" than toward Jesus.

Some feel that what constitutes "saving faith" is understanding that our own righteousness is worthless, and *trusting* in Jesus' righteousness is our only true righteousness.

The diversity of understanding of "saving faith" is limited only by the extent of human reasoning and continues to multiply with time.

The one thought paramount to this diversity of opinion is that faith cannot have the simple meaning of just being convinced that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Everyone knows that devils believe there is one God, and tremble. It is obvious that devils cannot be saved. I know nothing about the salvation of devils or any thing other than human beings. I don't feel anyone else knows much more about that subject either. It just does not appear reasonable at all to think that we can be counted righteous simply because we are convinced that what God has said is true. Too many people who do horrible things believe that Jesus is God's only begotten Son. We are always quick to state that we cannot earn our salvation. This is plainly stated and most of us believe it. Most just feel that we must somehow deserve it, even though this falls short of earning it. This belief is still a type of works.

Unnatural Righteousness

God has provided us with a number of illustrations to show us how the righteousness that he imputes to us (not natural righteousness) is not to be confused with our own self-righteousness (natural righteousness). Paul points out that the election of Jacob over Esau shows the difference in the imputed righteousness that is by God's own grace, and our own righteousness that is natural. He elected the second born (unnatural) over the first born which was the natural progression. He did this without regard to the works of either. Jacob was chosen by the will of God, not because he earned it and not even because he deserved it more than Esau.

Paul shows us further how Isaac's chain in the promise also illustrates the difference in natural righteousness and imputed righteousness. The promise did not proliferate through Ishmael or any other of Abraham's sons whose conceptions were through the natural process. The promise was through Isaac, whose conception was unnatural, being born to a woman past the age of bearing children naturally.

These illustrations should make it more clear to us that God's elect do not come through the natural process of righteousness. There is no relationship between the righteousness of God's elect (imputed righteousness) and the works (natural righteousness) of those chosen. He elects to save those who believe, not those whose deeds are the best or least evil. It is God's elected way to reward those who believe him.

Definition of Faith

Most religious teachers will teach that faith as used in the New Testament must imply more than "mental agreement." It must at least include a dedication (usually total dedication as if that were possible) to following Jesus' teachings. What they are teaching is that "saving faith" must include strict control of our mind toward being good boys and girls, and if we do this, God will forgive us when we "slip up" — at least if we don't slip up too often. Actually, God has given us a definition of just what he does mean by faith. Through the letter to the Hebrews he tells us that faith is the

substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). According to this definition, faith is not our dedication to something but our confidence in it. Faith is what we are convinced is true. It is what we accept with our mind — mental acceptance. More than this is more than faith. Try to fit some of the popular religionist views of faith into the definition found in Hebrews.

Saving Faith

God did not leave us with only a definition to help our understanding of what he means by faith. He gave us numerous illustrations. The most logical is that of Abraham. Paul uses Abraham's example to show us just what is meant by "saving faith." This is the faith by which Abram was counted righteous, and it is the same faith by which we can have imputed righteousness. On several occasions God promised Abram that he would be the father of many descendants, yet Sarai went childless. Finally, after all possibility of having an heir by natural means was past, God appeared to Abram in a dream and told him one more time that he would have many seed, as innumerable as the stars of the heaven, and from his own body. "And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:5-6)." This righteousness came not through natural ways, that is by Abram's own good deeds, nor his dedication, nor his love, nor any of his own efforts. It came because he believed the Lord. Did his faith include more than just being convinced that what God said was true? Did it more accurately come from a change in Abram being more dedicated to God, trying harder to please him, chastising himself, and being under strict control? Many would have you believe this. Paul tells us in Romans 4 that Abram did not stagger at the promise through unbelief; being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, He was also able to perform. Can there be a better definition and illustration of faith than this? The righteousness that came to Abram came to him because he was fully persuaded. He was convinced. God imputes righteousness by faith in the same way today. It comes to those who are fully persuaded, or convinced, about the Sonship of Jesus.

Did Abram's "saving" faith produce a change in him; that is, make him a more naturally righteous man? Did he show greater faith and a more righteous life after he was counted righteous? Actually, he again misled a nobleman into taking Sarai into his household to marry her, because he was afraid for his own life, even though God's promise had not yet been fulfilled. (How strong was this "saving faith" anyway?) As time went on, he evidently decided that God needed some help, so he took Sarai's handmaid and had a son by her. Abram's "saving faith" was not of the magnitude many of us would require today. I don't think that we can substantiate that Abram's saving faith was something that made him more naturally righteous or more consecrated to God, or was even a "life changing" faith. Abraham was the same old Abram, but now with imputed righteousness.

Let's face the facts. Faith in Jesus, "saving faith," is being convinced that what God said is true. "This is my beloved Son." This is what God wants from us in order to impute Christ's own righteousness to us. Is it too hard for us

to believe because it is unnatural? God has promised it. Believe it. It is so.

This is the one basis for unity among the elect. There is no other. Forget about hermeneutics. Forget about establishing an organization that is correct in form and spirit. There is no salvation in such. Salvation comes by being fully persuaded that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Don't worry about how much natural righteousness follows this imputed righteousness. Let it take care of itself. Encourage one another and help one another to be more self righteous (natural righteousness). That's what we have been newly created to do. Don't judge yourself or others concerning the amount of success achieved along these lines. You and I are miserable failures in other (natural) areas of righteousness. The Good News is that you are righteous because of your faith (convinced that Jesus is the Son of God), not on any other basis.

John Eoff, a member of the churches of Christ, lives in Kerrville, Texas.

Tolerating the Tolerable in the Church Today

JOHN W. LOFTUS

In the decade of the 90's should the Christian church emphasize the necessity of correct doctrine, or should we place an emphasis on mutual acceptance and tolerance of one another? In the Nov/Dec 1990 issue of *Integrity*, Hoy Ledbetter argued that our emphasis should be on tolerating one another, rather than demanding agreement on correct doctrinal and moral truth. More precisely, Ledbetter argued that it is better to tolerate one another than it is to divide over things not expressly taught in the word of God.

I liked the doctrinal freedom Ledbetter is willing to grant fellow Christians. What he wrote has direct application to the treatment of Christians who: 1) have charismatic interpretations of the Bible; 2) accept significant leadership roles for women in the church; 3) disagree with the term "inerrancy" to describe the Bible; and, 4) consider the possibility of theistic evolution. I can be tolerant and accepting of those who hold such viewpoints. But I not do it for the reasons Ledbetter wrote. I do it because of my

background and experience, which has taught me not to fear these views. I do it because of my education which has broadened my understanding. I also do it because of a maturing Christian love.

But it was Hoy Ledbetter's article which taught me these things, although he didn't intend to do so. When he suggested that differences over abortion "should never be allowed to disrupt brotherly relations," he forced me to rethink the whole issue of tolerance and truth. We should never treat Christians who disagree with us with disrespect, or a lack of cordiality. But there are deeper levels of fellowship that are impossible to achieve between Christians when they disagree on certain issues, abortion being one of them.

I question the wisdom of suggesting that we should tolerate differences on the issue of abortion. I don't think so, nor do I think Ledbetter has shown this. We will see this as we consider three topics: 1) the restoration hermeneutic; 2) the contrast between today's world and when the Stone-Campbell movement began; and, 3) the intolerance of Paul toward other Christians.

Now I happen to think there is one important Scripture reference concerning abortion that is overlooked but very potent in the Bible. In Genesis 1:27 we read: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." (NRSV) This Scripture verse tells us that all human beings are made in God's image. We are further taught that the baby in the womb is a human being, since it has a completed human chromosomal structure — a biological "inference" that simply cannot be denied. Therefore, abortion is killing an innocent human being who bears the image of God — it is an assault upon God.

Restoration Hermeneutic

Let's begin with the restoration hermeneutic. From my study in Restoration Movement history, I admit that Ledbetter stands solidly within our hermeneutical tradition. Only later in our history has a stress been placed on doctrinal correctness, rather than on mutual accep-

tance between Christians who disagree on an issue. For many preachers the phrase, "in non-essentials, liberty," means very little. The kinds of issues that now cause churches to disfellowship with each other are amazing, to say the least.

There are too many Christians who are majoring on the minors of the faith, and neglecting the major issues of our times, much like the Pharisees (Matthew 23:23). Christians seem to be arguing among themselves about non-issues while the world is going to hell in a handbasket. But our war is not with other Christians who disagree with us on relatively unimportant issues. Our enemy is the whole naturalistic-New-Age-Occultic world view which takes deadly aim at the Christian roots and values of the Western world. We are at war, and only as Christians in the various churches band together do we have hopes of overcoming the forces that seek to destroy our families, churches and nations as a whole.

As a student of our modern era, there are some questions that we who stand in the Stone-Campbell Movement must consider. We live in a society where churches themselves are becoming increasingly pluralistic and eclectic in their approach to Scripture. I heard one preacher even say that we cannot do *exegesis*. We can only do *eisegesis*, he argued, although God still speaks to us through this method of handling the Bible. Other church leaders are opening themselves up to New Age thinking. They claim that the belief in a series of reincarnations is not explicitly contradicted by a final resurrection.¹ There are still other church leaders who think there is nothing wrong with a loving homosexual relationship. They claim that Scripture doesn't explicitly condemn a homosexual orientation, nor a loving monogamous homosexual union.²

Actually, I happen to think that a case can be made for each of the above arguments, although I strongly disagree with them all. But it is not easy to find a Scripture verse dealing with these issues that clearly and unambiguously condemns such viewpoints. Some very important issues are not a matter of finding a Bible verse that supports them. In fact, there is very little, if anything, that we believe which is

"definitely and unmistakably stated in Scripture." In any act of interpretation we must use "inferences and deductions from Scripture premises." Even when arriving at our doctrine of Scripture, we must make plenty of assumptions and deductions from what we read in Scripture. There is even disagreement, between those who share the same view of Scripture, over the nature of Christ. The modern day Arians don't agree with the inferences and deductions we find in the Scriptures that show Jesus is God the Son.

My point is that there is no Lockean "tabula rasa" upon which we can immediately ascertain the truth of a certain doctrine without making inferences and deductions from Scripture. We operate out of a set of assumptions and presuppositions that seem to make hermeneutical sense out of the sum totality of people, events, writings, and objects in the world. The question for us is which world-view makes sense out of the sum totality of these things.

So it is doublespeak to arrive at a faith in Christ that is binding upon all Christians based upon Scriptural deductions and inferences, and then to say that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith" unless it is "definitely and unmistakably stated" in the word of God. If pro-life teaching should not be binding on all Christians precisely because it depends upon Scriptural inferences, deductions, and assumptions, then exactly what should be binding upon those who profess Christ, if anything? Nearly everything we believe depends upon Scriptural inferences, deductions and assumptions.

Contrasting the Times

Next, I want to compare the moral and doctrinal climate between Campbell's day and our own. In contrast to the pluralism and eclecticism of our era, the Stone-Campbell Movement began on American soil when churches held to most all of the essential doctrinal and moral truths of the Christian world-view. They later saw the need for restoring the teaching about baptism, but they didn't debate among themselves the issues that professed Christians

of today do. Our debates seem to be much more serious, with more at stake for life on planet earth.

Did the Campbells have serious discussions with professing Christians who believed in reincarnation, homosexuality, or a feminist critique of the Bible and western society? Did the issues they wrestled with have the potential impact that modern debates about euthanasia, bio-genetics, fetal research and transvestites pose? What about the impact of mass media, and the power of the state in the technological revolution? Did their generation face the possible extinction of the earth through nuclear warfare? Did they face the magnitude of poverty that the Third World faces today?

The decade of the 90's is the decade of decision for Christians, our families, churches, schools, and nations as a whole. Yet, we come to the truth on these issues based upon "inferences and deductions from Scriptural premises." I prefer to call such inferences "the applications of the Christian world-view to societal issues." Since we live in a modern, post-modern, and now even an "ultra modern" world, we must apply the Christian world-view to issues of nuclear war, abortions, euthanasia, feminism, welfare, AIDS policy, economic policy, and so forth. The consequences of making the wrong applications can mean that families will be destroyed, freedom could be lost, and people will be slaughtered. It's that serious.

In such a decade as ours, does anyone really think that the Campbells would place the same emphasis upon tolerance and mutual acceptance, when a wrong inference from Scripture on a major issue of our time could mean that families will be destroyed and many people slaughtered? More to the point, I just don't think they would tolerate the human carnage of abortion to continue.

The real reason that Ledbetter asks for tolerance on the issue of abortion is not because of the restoration hermeneutic, as he stated. That hermeneutic is fatally flawed. Let me suggest that the real reason is because he does not think America's abortion policy is immoral, for if he did, he would feel as I do.

The Intolerance of Paul

Let's finally consider how tolerant Paul acted toward Christians who disagreed with him on a select group of beliefs. There seems to be one evangelistic method that Paul was not willing to capitulate on. Paul wrote: "I have become all things to all people, that I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22, NRSV). Exactly how tolerant was Paul toward those who disagreed with him on this principle? Paul himself publicly opposed Peter, in part because Peter was not willing to become a Gentile in order to win Gentiles. Peter befriended the Judaizers (2:11-21) and played the hypocrite against the Gentiles, and this made Paul angry.

Paul also had no small doctrinal dissension with the Judaizers over the issue of circumcision itself (Acts 15; Gal. 2). "After all," I could hear someone say in Paul's day, "what is the harm in being circumcised?" But for Paul it was a matter of serious dispute and division which he would not tolerate because of its soteriological implications and his mission to the Gentiles.

Of course, immoral behavior was not tolerated by Paul either. He asked the Corinthians to remove a professed Christian man from their midst who was sexually immoral (I Cor. 5). In removing him, Paul did not want to cause him to be "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (II Cor. 2:7). Paul's intolerance is crystal clear when he wrote that we shouldn't associate with "anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one" (I Cor. 5:11, NRSV). While this may seem harsh to us, Paul would not hesitate to minister to any one of them who wanted to change.

Seeing this side to Paul makes me question the wisdom in using him as a model of tolerance with the Corinthian church. Exactly how long would Paul have tolerated this church if he saw no change? (cf. II Cor. 10-13). What if the church in Corinth had not repented and listened to what Paul commanded them? (II Cor. 2:1-11; 7:8-12). In order to stress the need for obedience, Paul even reminded them that what he was writing was the Lord's command (I Cor. 2:13; 14:37). He warned them that if he re-

turned a third time and found little or no change he "would not be lenient" (II Cor. 13:1-3). Paul also wrote that he may have to "be severe" in dealing with them with his authority "for tearing down" (II Cor. 13:10, NRSV). Paul even found it important to separate himself from John Mark on one occasion, for desertion and/or irresponsibility (Acts 15:37-38).

Now for the point. Abortion is a moral issue, and we know that Paul was intolerant of immorality among Christians. So it's equally clear that Paul wouldn't tolerate the killing of babies in the womb.³ Nor would Paul tolerate a church that condoned the wanton slaughter of unborn little children, or helped participate in the destruction of the family, or responsible freedom. Perhaps these issues are ones that are worth dividing over if, after much effort and prayer, there is no success.

A Principled Intolerance

Christians are given a dominion mandate as well as a commission mandate (Gen. 1:26; John 20:21; Matt. 28:18-20). We are salt as well as light (Matt. 5:13-16). Redemption is intended to be holistic, where Christ transforms our whole existence, public as well as private; social as well as personal; including the familial, political, physical, economical, and mental areas in substantial ways. Because this is true, there will be some essentials in the area of ethical and social truths that ought to be binding upon all Christians. I would argue that all Christians would have an essential commitment to the sanctity of life, responsible freedom, and the traditional family unit as the basic unit of society. These moral truths are transcultural ones.

We simply cannot read of Jesus in the Gospels, or Paul in the epistles, and say that mutual tolerance was stressed at the price of essential doctrinal and moral truth. They are to be stressed equally, but there will be occasions when these two ideals will be in conflict. When this happens, some tough decisions have to be made for the sake of our churches, families and nations. No easy explicit rules or principles can predict in advance which of the two ideals should be stressed when they are in tension. But perhaps in this coming decade God

will both unite and purify the church through the issues of our day.

Is there any guidance to suggest appropriate times for intolerance? I think there is. Clark Pinnock has suggested that at the deepest level of analysis there are only two theologies: those that take the Bible seriously and those that do not; those that are based upon Scripture and those that are based upon human experience.⁴ Churches that don't do this, I have difficulty tolerating.

The churches we might have reason to be increasingly intolerant toward are those engaged in a fatal flirtation with secularism. James Hitchcock has argued that some professing Christians are secularists. He wrote that "some secularists profess belief in God, and some are even clergy." How can this be? Because they live "as though God did not exist. His existence may be formally acknowledged, but life is organized in such a way that he makes no difference" — especially in the public arena.⁵ Churches that attempt to mirror our culture rather than judge it, deserve the judgment of our intolerance.

Exactly how much should we tolerate of other professed Christians? Here I can do no better than Richard Baxter, who said in the 17th century that he could only "tolerate the tolerable."

End Notes

1 Hebrews 9:27 has been interpreted to mean that it is appointed to men that our SOULS die just once (not necessarily our bodies) then comes the resurrection and judgment.

2 See John Stott's discussion on homosexuality in *Involve-ment: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Revell, 1985).

3. Some will argue that since Paul tolerated Philemon's slave ownership, we can tolerate similar kinds of injustice. But S. Scott Bartchy has argued that there is a vast difference between slavery in the Roman world and what we fought a Civil War over. See his book, *First Century Slavery and the Interpretation of I Corinthians 7:21* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series; 11, 1973).

4 See chapter one of Pinnock's *Three Keys to Spiritual Renewal* (Bethany House, 1985).

5 Quoted from "Dissentangling the Secular Humanism Debate," in *Whose Values?: The Battle for Morality in Pluralistic America* ed, Carl Horn (Servant Book, 1985), p. 23.

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Tolerating the Tolerable: A Reply

HOY LEDBETTER

Elsewhere in this issue John Loftus argues against my suggestion, made in a previous article on tolerance, that one's view on abortion, important though it may be, should not be made a test of fellowship for the simple reason that, since abortion is not mentioned in the Bible, any position we hold must necessarily depend upon inferences and deductions. I hope you will give

careful attention to what he has to say. However, I do believe that some of his conclusions are unwarranted and potentially damaging to the church's vital sense of community, and hence the following.

John sets up a tension between "mutual tolerance" and "essential doctrinal and moral truth" which really does not represent my posi-

tion. I never suggested that we give up essential doctrine for the sake of tolerance. If doctrine is really *essential*, then by all means it should not be given up. The problem is that every faction regards as essential its peculiar beliefs, and every student of our history knows that what one person calls "essential" may be viewed by another as a divisive opinion. What we need is a universally accepted rule for deciding what is essential in the sense that it must be required of all.

Thomas Campbell, as my article indicated, answered that need by insisting that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith, nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God." What is "expressly taught" is, according to the dictionary, "definitely and unmistakably stated" and according to Campbell, and, I believe, the Bible, that, and nothing more, should be a requirement for fellowship.

But inferences and deductions from Scripture, which are the usual causes of doctrinal division, are often given the same dogmatic status as what is "expressly taught," and this is where I believe John gets into trouble.

Inferences and Deductions

Campbell proposed "that although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made in terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession."

This clear statement not only makes good sense to reasonable people, but it also reflects the view of the early church that not all true doctrine is necessarily essential doctrine in the sense that everyone must believe it in order to

have a place in the communion. No truth that can only be grasped by inference, even truth that "may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word," should be a test of fellowship. The church's confession must rest upon the surer foundation of express teaching and injunction.

In using abortion to illustrate how this principle might be applied to our generation, I evidently hit a tender nerve in more than one reader. Many of us fail to appreciate the fact that a young preacher looking for the Scriptural position on abortion can find no reference to it in the Bible. And for that reason he may also look in vain for a discussion of it in his Bible dictionary. His position will be reached by way of inferences and deductions which, at least initially, were not his own but someone else's. Even though he is college educated, he may not be able to reach a firm conclusion without the help of material outside the Bible.

My article mentioned the fact that John Powell's book did not cite a single Scripture. John Loftus did cite one, but it takes a great deal of exegetical hocus-pocus to find abortion in it. This is not to say that his conclusion is not true, but it is, as Campbell would say, "in a great measure the effect of human reasoning;" and, therefore, should be disallowed as a term of communion.

Insisting that the "restoration hermeneutic" is "fatally flawed," John asserted that "it doublespeak to arrive at a faith in Christ that is binding upon all Christians based upon Scriptural deductions and inferences, and then to say that 'nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith' unless it is 'definitely and unmistakably stated' in the word of God. If pro-life teaching should not be binding on all Christians precisely because it depends upon Scriptural inferences, deductions, and assumptions, then exactly what should be binding upon those who profess Christ, if anything? Nearly everything we believe depends upon Scriptural inferences, deductions and assumptions."

If that is true, then "nearly everything we believe" should not be made a test of fellowship. But this view understates the express teaching of Scripture and places too high a premium on human reasoning. The statement

that we have arrived at "a faith in Christ that is binding upon all based upon Scriptural deductions and inferences" may not be entirely autobiographical, but it does not speak for those of us who received our fundamental confession that Jesus is Lord, and a great deal more, from definite and unmistakable statements of Scripture, and who have no desire to bind upon others a faith in Christ that is based upon deductions and inferences.

Take the Bible Seriously

Some may reasonably take exception to the implications of the assertion that "there are only two theologies: those that take the Bible seriously and those that do not; those that are based upon Scripture and those that are based upon human experience." John's reference to "human experience" is interesting in view of his previous statement that he is tolerant regarding such issues as charismatics, women leaders, inerrancy, and theistic evolution because of his background and experience, education, and maturing Christian love.

If his "experience" (among other things) allows him to tolerate views that are sheer heresy to some of his brethren, does that mean he does not take the Bible seriously? Of course not! We only wish he could be equally understanding of those who, for similar reasons, are tolerant on other issues, including abortion.

This may be a good place to issue a warning for us all, since the need for it seems to be quite widespread. It is a convenient device of the sectarian frame of mind to charge opponents with not taking the Bible seriously. Surely we have heard this from every party in the Restoration Movement in defense of a variety of positions. It is really a low blow, almost always unjustified, and is hardly calculated to win friends and influence brethren who do not already agree with the accuser. Perhaps we are most vulnerable to it when we are very sure of our position, but it may also be the desperate resort of the fearful.

John says in effect that the Declaration and Address would never have been written if Thomas Campbell had lived in our time, since our debates are much more serious, with more

at stake. One could say with equal vigor, and, I believe, greater accuracy, that we Christians have the duty of "hastening on the coming of the day of God," when we will have "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

Since there is a direct connection between our conduct and the dissolution of this present evil world, we must make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit, a requirement that is emphasized on practically every opening of the New Testament. If, indeed, the world is in such a mess, surely we have something better to do than isolate ourselves from each other over issues that should be debated within the family.

The problem is not that we live in a different world from that of our forefathers, but that we have become too sectarian to believe that Jesus is Lord of all. We have no right to either judge our brother or to regard our brother with contempt because of a lack of consensus in human reasoning.

John cites as an example of Paul's intolerance the fact that Paul "publicly opposed Peter." The example hurts rather than helps his case, for Peter's unacceptable behavior was a refusal, under pressure from the conservatives, to eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, which had the effect of making the bounds of fellowship too narrow. It was Peter's support of intolerance to which Paul objected. But it should be noted that Paul showed no signs of breaking fellowship with Peter over the matter. It was a serious offense, but it was dealt with within the family.

John's allusion to circumcision appears to overlook the fact that Paul performed certain acts of worship in the temple to disprove the rumor that he was "teaching all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). He never required a Jew to refrain from keeping the Law, no more than he allowed the Jews to bind their own view of the "plan of salvation" upon the Gentiles.

John's argument that Paul would not tolerate a church that condoned abortion is special pleading which not only elevates a particular view of abortion to a fundamental of the faith, but also minimizes Paul's determination that the

church should not be divided. I believe he misreads Paul.

He also misreads me. He says, "The real reason Ledbetter asks for tolerance on the issue of abortion. . . is because he does not think America's abortion policy is immoral, for if he did, he would feel as I do." He obviously does not know my position on abortion. Nor can he appreciate my understanding of how strongly the Bible enforces our duty to refrain from lord-

ing it over the faith of our fellow saints and requiring from them "a profession more extensive than their knowledge." It is unfortunate that his preoccupation with one issue, which I agree is quite important, has placed him at odds with both the Bible and our rich heritage.

Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrity* for 15 years, has served as minister to several a cappella Churches of Christ during his years of ministry. He presently serves First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Albany, Georgia with his wife Jary and daughter Priscilla.

Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and more recently Os Guinness' *Gravedigger Files*.

We have an imaginary setting where Bruce accidentally comes across these letters between the nefarious teacher Apollyon and the young devil Ichabod.

Dear Fledgling Politico,

Your political power play offers infinite opportunities to further our diabolical cause; and you apparently are gathering diversified, effective backing from those whom you have enrolled. That they are seeking personal aggrandizement and higher stations would be a "given;" it "goes with the territory," so to speak. You cannot find two appetites more susceptible to exploitation! You are authorized to promise the most likely candidates *anything* within reason; we can take care of the fulfillment, since we have dealt with similar political matters routinely for eons of time. You will soon discover that such tactics are all but guaranteed to be successful since they exploit at least two primary human weaknesses: greed and pride.

Regarding "certain religious platitudes,"

they are always effective when properly used. Any time a politician uses the name of the Enemy, even as nothing more than a casual reference dragged into a political speech, it is sure to draw the attention of a sizeable segment of the public. By all means, you must master this fact and make full use of it; it will serve your ends well.

That man Whitesoul is a continuing major annoyance to us in Topeka. Totally under the Enemy's control. None of our agents, it seems, can find a chink in his armor. Keep looking. After all, he *is* human. How difficult it is to deal with one of those truly, totally committed servants of the Enemy! They are a rare breed. Living above lies or efforts at character assassination, they manifest a sickly sweetness and a confidence that all things will ultimately

work toward a favorable conclusion. We give this matter our concentrated attention and endless debate, and we try every possible device to combat such individuals. But I must confess that we are powerless where the person involved is genuine. Should you manage to crack through Whitesoul's spiritual armor, you could name your reward.

By contrast, the Rosie/Ralph situation is a laugher, made to order for instant utilization. They have already done most of your work for you. Your obvious approach now is to be a middle-man, carrying inflammatory words — those which they have actually spoken, or those of your own device — from one camp to the other. In doing so you will, quite obviously, feign an allegiance to whichever faction you are addressing. Properly done, these inflammatory statements will quickly permeate a large portion of the entire Broad Way congregation. Go to it, and use your newfound Linguaflap to full advantage.

I fear, from what you have said, that Brother Eddie Fyer's usefulness to our cause has been damaged with his loss of credibility. Adherents of our Enemy's pernicious doctrines almost never fail to ascribe responsibility for the misdeeds of an errant child to the often-innocent parents with what they perceive to be inerrant logic: they can't possibly be all they claim to be if their children turn out badly. Don't dismiss the Fyers entirely, however. In their sorrow and induced shame, they may become unknowing tools for our exploitation.

Continue in your present mode. Be diligent and seize every opportunity to exploit whomever you can, whenever and wherever you can.

Your Tutor in Treachery,
Uncle Apollyon

My Dear Mephistolic Master,

Thank you for your latest marvelously malicious advice. The political gambit is still bearing fruit, especially in view of the recent outbreak of hostilities in the Arabian Gulf (how

delightful to use righteous indignation as an avenue to unrepentant hatred!). And loose tongues and tender egos continue to further our cause at Broad Way. But there is another development that both puzzles and gratifies me: two congregations in a town close by, one of whom split off from the other years ago, have opened fire on each other again, competing for the allegiance of a young couple who have been visiting the "stricter-than-thou's" instead of the "mainstreamers."

What I find puzzling is that, after years of not speaking to — and hardly thinking of — each other, these two groups can with such alacrity and zest reopen the wounds of the original split. And all of this acrimony over issues like whether it's permissible to have a kitchen in the church building and whether the church can render benevolent aid to those (even children!) who are not "members of the church." But who am I to question a situation that so excellently furthers our cause? The young couple for several months tried the "mainstreamers" (a term which I use merely to convey the fact that their particular brand of narrowness is in the majority in the denomination), and they found them to be so dead that they wondered if they had stumbled into some bizarre morgue with piped-in sermons and songs. The couple decided then to visit the other congregation (the "stricter-than-thou's"), hoping at least to find some warm fellowship. They were, indeed, treated cordially and were invited to dinner with some of the members. Now here's another source of my puzzlement: these people in the break-away congregation have great affection for each other, being a close-knit minority among their brethren; but (luckily for us) their hard times have not generated any great love for people outside their group. Well, the "mainstreamer" elders got wind of the young couple's having "strayed" to the other congregation and mounted an all-out campaign to inform them of the great peril of fellowshipping those church-splitters on the other side of town. I hope that by now the couple are either thoroughly confused and unable to feel comfortable at either congregation, or that they are moved to decide that if this is an

example of religious zeal, they can do without the church altogether. You'd better instruct our agents to keep an eye on that "stricter-than-thou" church, though; if they ever figure out that their love for each other and their warmer worship atmosphere are incompatible with their narrow self-righteousness toward outsiders, they might be vulnerable to being taken over by the Enemy's Spirit.

Back to the lovely war we've stirred up over in the Middle East. I don't like the increased amount of praying nor the enlarged concern about life and death that these troubles have brought about. There is some hope, however, of turning the differences of opinion about the war into conflict within the fellowship. Not only are there "hawks" and "doves," but some of

the self-appointed eschatological sages among the saints are having a grand time helping God to clarify the obscurest passages of prophecy in His Word. Some people seem to think that Armageddon is going to be a kind of Super Bowl, even better than the Second Coming, and that their role is to advertise and maybe even sell tickets for it! Some of them had better hope it's put off a lot longer than they think. I know I don't have any hankering to see it come; I prefer the kind of war where the results are open-ended, but equally destructive to both sides.

Your partner in unholy war,

Ichabod

News and Comments

****Christians for Biblical Equality* is an organization with which you may want to connect. Such conservative evangelicals as F.F. Bruce and Kenneth Kantzer have endorsed this organization which stands for the propositions that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and Redemption. You can find out more about this group by writing: Christians for Biblical Equality, 7433 Borman Ave., E., Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076.

***In March, the College Park Christian Church in Normal, Illinois, celebrates its merger's 20th anniversary! Twenty years ago in March 1971, Emerson Street Church of Christ, a non-instrument church, merged with Sunset Christian Church, a newly-formed independent Christian Church which met in Normal. The precedent-setting merger followed three months of discussion between leaders of

both groups, who decided to "reverse the separations" by committing themselves to work through doctrinal differences in order to unite. The congregation has more than tripled in size since the merger, is active and growing steadily. Celebration plans for each weekend include guest speakers and an anniversary banquet. Congratulations!

***One of the by-products of *Integrity's* ministry is connecting Christians for dialogue, study, sharing, and encouragement. We are encouraged by several of you who write us from time to time, sharing about your lives, your congregations, your struggles, your joys, and your sorrows. Some of our readers send us letters to forward to our writers, and from this sometimes further correspondence, dialogue, and friendships result. Thanks for allowing those involved in the *Integrity* ministry to be a part of your lives!

My Jesus

KATHY WYLER

Somewhere
 between the New Jerusalem
 and the Valley of the Shadow
 My Jesus strides —
 between the cannon and the tanks,
 the bunkers and the trenches —
 dune of sand
 ship of sea
 plane of sky —
 Nothing hides
 and nothing is a stranger
 to His view.

Somewhere
 between the Two Eternities
 My Jesus works
 and plays
 and laughs
 and cries —
 His eyes
 are mine
 His hands
 my hands
 His feet
 my feet
 Should I repeat some sterile prayer
 He is there
 to hide it from the ear of God.
 When I run before Him
 scattering my dirty little sins
 He quickly picks them up,
 puts them in His pockets. . .
 all forgotten.

Somewhere
 between the Holiest of Holies
 and the dusk of Final Doom
 My Jesus walks — among the fragrant gardens
 set in flowing emerald lawns —
 along the whitened flagstone paths —
 beneath gazebo's lace —
 (the sun makes lattice shadows on His face)
 He smiles the songs from birds
 and smells the flowers into bloom.
 His silent ringing words
 peal through the weeping years
 to dry their tears.

Yes — Somewhere among the Garden's Trees
 My Jesus sits — in God's own Shade of Time.
 He spreads a picnic
 on the grass —
 He welcomes me to sit —
 we laugh
 we talk —
 He breaks the Loaf
 He pours the Wine
 we dine.

Kathy Wyler is a retired AT&T employee who has been writing poetry since she was 7 and "cannot but write." Born in Africa of American missionary parents and raised on the campuses of Abilene Christian University and Harding, Kathy calls herself a "Christian-at-Large."