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acknowledge, in small doses, how our sin adds to the world's frightening stockpile of horror and damage—like children daring to sneak a peek under the tent at a circus side show, then backing off and running away from the freakish displays inside. The true effect of our sins is more than we can bear.

And in turn, I think the gift of God's gracious forgiveness through Jesus is also far greater than I can really comprehend. Next to the Supreme Being, my own Creator, who emanates astonishing glory and beauty and holy, penetrating love, my sins are like bird droppings on a new white, wedding dress—filthy, offensive, and requiring quick, dismissive action. Since the pure holiness of our God is much greater than we can fathom, it follows that the gift of grace which allows us to be in God's presence is unbelievably magnanimous . . . a far more valuable gift than we can completely comprehend.

I needed a little grace for those broken college dorm rules. I need far more grace to cover my life's constant "infractions." A few moments' reflection on our sin and God's grace moves all of us believers to echo Paul when he writes, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

May this issue of *Integrity*, which touches on various aspects of God's grace, be encouraging to you!

Diane G. H. Kilmer
Co-editor

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.

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How Broad is the Grace of God?

One of the earliest, more comical experiences I've had with law-breaking and the need for grace occurred nearly 30 years ago when I transferred as a junior to Abilene Christian College. I considered myself a "good citizen" when I moved onto campus. My self-image was soon tarnished as I began racking up "demerits" at my residence hall.

No matter how hard I studied that student policy handbook, I simply couldn't remember all the rules! Although I never made the same mistake twice, my good intentions were not enough to keep up with that thick list of unfamiliar laws. One by one demerits began to accumulate for everything from being one minute late for curfew to wearing women's slacks (pants) on Sunday afternoon! (Horrors!)

Final judgment came down just before Christmas. Someone (who cared?) noticed that I had not been signing out properly the whole semester each time I left campus for my weekday babysitting job. Even though my blunder was entirely unintentional and a misunderstanding on my part, (and no harm had been done), still the dorm mother multiplied all those days by all those weeks and pronounced me "dormed." (I didn't even know what that meant!) During my last weekend before Christmas I was "jailed" in my room except for meals and church. No grace was extended, not even by the seemingly sympathetic Dean of Women to whom I appealed. Rules had been broken. Consequences must be carried out.

I never did share the same horrified sense of wrong-doing that my dorm mother felt about my infractions during this more trivial experience of law without grace. However, when it comes to my "infractions" against God, I've come to suspect that all of our sins—everything from "little white lies" to murderous hatefulness—are truly far worse than we care to admit. Once in a while we dare to

(Continued on the back page)

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Amazing, Transforming Grace: Part II

JOSEPH F. JONES

Few biblical teachings have been more grossly misunderstood, abused, denied, or ill applied than the biblical doctrine of grace. Antinomians and libertines have abused and used it to justify their license to sin. Legalists have used it as a word which embodies the gospel, while continuing to preach and practice a religion of works-salvation. Judaizers through the centuries have agreed that Paul was right in preaching salvation by the gospel of grace, but insisted that it must be grace plus the law (in Paul's day, the rite of circumcision). Others have presented grace as a kind of free-floating religious atmosphere, nebulous, ill-defined, and with very inadequate biblical teaching on how this divine source of salvation and life is to be received and appropriated by the believer.

In this second article on the doctrine of grace (see July/August 1995), I will discuss the concept of religion under both law and grace. The New Testament writers were very clear in their understanding of the two basic approaches of people to God, that is, the religion of law versus the religion of grace:

- "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law came through Moses; grace and truth (reality) came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16, 17).
- "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20).
- "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works (deeds of law-keeping), so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Multiple passages bear out this biblical

affirmation, that if humankind is saved at all, it will be by grace, not by works or deeds of law-keeping. The two concepts are basically contradictory.

Many Christians are driven by a religion of human efforts and works, devoid of any joy or dynamic, motivated by human pride to bring God into their debt, a theology which one writer has characterized as "the most dangerous heresy on earth." What then is the essence of these two religious approaches to God, that is, law or grace?

Legal or Personal Relationship?

Religion under law is essentially a legal relationship, while grace provides an intensely personal friendship and fellowship with God. Under law the essence of religion is law-keeping (Phil. 3:6-9; Romans 7:7-14). The Torah (law) is regarded as the ultimate basis for one's relationship with God; and the core of the religious situation is clear and simple: through law God has entered into a bargain with humans, and consequently, God came to be perceived primarily as a mighty Law-Giver. Here the quality of mercy came to be somewhat secondary in the Hebrew's conception of God.

In striking contrast, the impersonal quality of Jewish legalism was transcended when the early disciples were converted to Jesus as Lord and Christ. Not the law, but Jesus Christ became the center of the Christian's faith, daily walk, and hope of eternal life (Acts 2:36; I Cor. 3:22-24). This new walk is a spiritual union, life lived by and filled with the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, the Spirit given completely through the mercy and goodness of God (Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:19).

Demand or Gift?

The essence of the law, any law, is that it imposes a demand. Laws are commandments that prescribe modes of conduct; hence, the nature of law is to demand obedience. Law imposes its demands unconditionally; law is absolute and unyielding. Consequently, law's primary purpose is to sharpen the consciousness or knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). Yet law does not provide any enabling power to meet its demands. Even while claiming to have kept the external demands of the law, the apostle Paul acknowledges that he violated the deeper, inner intent of the law (Phil. 3:6; Rom. 7:21-25). Torn in this awesome conflict, Paul was not delivered from his wretchedness by law, but by the risen, living Lord!

Whereas religion under law emphasizes the primacy of demand, the religion of grace affirms boldly that God's gift precedes demand. The marvelous and startling thing about Christianity is that God takes the initiative to come to us in the Person of Jesus (Rom. 5:5-8; II Cor. 5:21). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The question about salvation needs to be reframed, for the first question is not, "What must I do to be saved?" but rather, "What has God first done to save me?" (Acts 2:36-39).

This gift of God in Jesus Christ, so totally unmerited and unconditional, can only be appropriated through one's willingness to accept it. Turn around, look at Me face to face, God says. Now hold out your hands and take it, experience it. The basic message of Pentecost is what God has done through Jesus—crucified, raised, and exalted as Savior, Lord, and Christ! How may we know and receive him, they ask? "Repent, and get yourselves baptized into his name," and you will receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Was this response a work or law-deed, which when done enabled them to lay claim upon

God? In Paul's emphatic response, "*Me ginoito.*" God forbid, be it not so!

First, there is the free gift of God; then there is the demand or means of appropriating it. The gift of grace is antecedent to the demand for righteousness. Through his grace accepted by faith God declares us righteous, and then says, "now that you are declared righteous, demonstrate it by your Spirit-filled life."

Several months ago while preaching on this very theme, I took a bill (green-back) from my wallet, and asked a new Christian brother to come to the rostrum for a gift. He willingly came to the rostrum, and I said to him, before placing the bill in his hand, "Do I owe you anything? Any debt that I haven't paid to you?" His answer was a clear, resounding, "No." Then, placing the bill in his open hand, I said to him, "This is yours, free, gratis; take it, keep it, use it." Did he earn it by coming to receive? By holding out an open hand? He only believed my promise, came humbly with open hand to receive it, graciously thanked me, and returned to his seat.

The marvelous and startling thing about Christianity is that God takes the initiative to come to us in the Person of Jesus.

Aurelius Augustine was right when he prayed, "All my hope is vain save in Thy great mercy. Grant what Thou commandest, O Lord, and (then) command what Thou wilt" (*Confessions*, Bk. X, Ch. XXIX).

Provision for Failure

In a legal relationship, when a person breaks any of the terms of the contract, that person loses the reward (James 2:10).

Consequently, failure to keep the law perfectly creates guilt, but does not provide any succor or help. Most of us have experienced the conflict, the frustration, and anger caused by living under a system of constant demands while knowing (experientially) that we cannot meet those demands! Under Jewish law, it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Heb. 10:4). No amount of animal sacrifices, law-keeping, human works or efforts, religious rules or regulations could ever make a person right with God. Religion under law fosters bondage and slavery with no final provision for failure available.

In striking contrast to this inadequacy in human efforts is the glorious Good News that in Jesus Christ there is fulfillment, abundant forgiveness, removal of guilt, and divine empowerment.

Only the perfect offering of God's own Son on Calvary could atone for sin (Heb. 10:4). Christianity's message of divine forgiveness means precisely that a human's moral failure need not spell permanent defeat. A gracious God is tenderly watching over us. A waiting Father is anxious and eager to share his forgiveness and fellowship, remove our guilt, and restore us to spiritual soundness (wholeness) (Luke 15:11-32).

Not law but grace brings God's provision for humankind's woeful inadequacy and assures the sinner who believes that Christ has indeed died for them. It was the grace-awakening which Paul experienced that freed him from what he describes as human wretchedness (Rom. 7:24), and enabled him to exult in the freedom from condemnation found in a relationship with Christ (Rom. 7:25; 8:1). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law (principle) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law (principle) of sin and death." And this is all of grace!

Pride or Humility?

Keeping a law—any law—perfectly brings a sense of perfect achievement and pride, resulting in a feeling of a meritorious life. One can rightly and justifiably demand any rewards that go with perfect behavior, Paul argued in his Roman letter. "To one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due" (Rom. 4:4). We should recognize that there was a deeper inner core of the law which was spiritual in nature, which focused on a higher conception of religion as a personal trust between God and humankind, a core of truth embodying the two greatest commandments: (1) to love God supremely with one's whole being, and (2) to love one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus taught this truth and the apostle Paul underscored it when writing that love is the fulfillment of the deeper intention of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

The impersonality of law renders it inadequate to create and foster the virtues of faith and love . . .

The impersonality of law renders it inadequate to create and foster the virtues of faith and love characteristic of the kingdom man or woman. What is needed to produce faith in God and love toward others is the presence and influence of a personal redeemer who can lead people into a personal union with the transforming Spirit of the living God (John 3:3-8). The pride and boasting of the religiously legalistic individual (Jew or Gentile) is not surprising to witness, neither is the strange distortion of the true spirit of religion wherever religiously legalistic principle prevails. Caught up in such a distortion, many

may boast of their individual or congregational achievements, their superior knowledge of Scripture, or the absolute rightness of their interpretation of Scripture.

In sharp contrast to the spirit of pride and boasting fostered by law-keeping, the religion of grace creates profound humility and dependence upon God. Realizing that all his striving for perfection was still inadequate as grounds for acceptance by God, Saul the zealous Pharisee, cornered by the risen Christ and beaten to earth on the Damascus Road, could later write, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them,—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (I Cor. 15:10). The saved Saul knew that he had been saved by grace through faith, and not by any works of law (or any other works); and that the deeds of his new life in Christ were the result of his being "in Christ," the natural fruit of his union with the living Lord. Such humility is a central and foundational aspect of the Christian faith and the believer's life and character.

Desperate Despair or Enduring Peace?

Few experiences of life are more conducive to despair and depression than failure, and this the apostle Paul knew only too well.

Law-keeping . . . as a basis for being right with God is destined to end in the same desperate awareness of failure which we hear in the apostle's personal confession.

Caught in the human dilemma of knowing right and doing wrong, he describes his helpless plight in trying to please God: he is a "wretched man," consigned to "this body of death." In his desperate despair and unresolved inner conflict, this servant of God cries out for deliverance. "Who will rescue (deliver) me" from this sense of failure, defeat, guilt, and helplessness? Law-keeping by the Jew or the Christian as a basis for being right with God is destined to end in the same desperate awareness of failure which we hear in the apostle's personal confession.

If law-keeping engenders despair and desperateness of soul and results in uncertainty of one's salvation, then when a person shifts his or her basis of salvation from the frantic struggles of law-keeping to acceptance of the peace and joy which come in an experience of God's grace in Christ, that person shifts from despair to indescribable joy in the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

Under Law or Grace?

In summary then, let us contrast the essential elements of religion under law and grace:

1. Whereas religion under law makes for an impersonal, legal relationship, the religion of grace in Christ establishes a personal communion with God;
2. Whereas the essence of law is to impose a demand, the heart of God's Gospel offers a gift before the demand;
3. While there is no final provision for failure under a law system, in the cross of Christ there is adequate and final provision for humankind's failure—forgiveness, real and sweet;

4. While law-keeping inevitably fosters pride and boasting, the undeserved grace of God produces profound humility and dependence.

5. And finally, while failure to live the perfect life of law-keeping is destined to end in despair, the grace of God bestows an enduring peace and inner quiet indicative of God's gracious presence.

Author's Note: Through fifty-three years of intense biblical study and teaching, I have examined countless volumes on the subject of grace. But here I would simply acknowledge three sources, other than Scripture itself, in which I found much insight. Two contemporary sources are gratefully recognized: William Pile, *What the Bible Says About Grace* (College Press); Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church* (ACU Press); and class notes from my "Constructive Theology Courses" under one of the most insightful and inspirational teachers our Restoration Movement has ever produced, the late Dr. Ralph Wilburn.

Dr. Joseph F. Jones has ministered to the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan, for more than 26 years. He holds doctorates in the field of higher education and pastoral counseling. Joseph has worked and written for *Integrity* magazine since its earliest days and served as President of the Board for more than 13 years.

Why There Are Schisms in the Body

NEAL GRIFFIN

We can agree at the outset that there should be no schisms in the body of Christ because all Christians are joint heirs and family members in God's adopted family. Paul points out the absurd repugnance of schisms in the body of Christ when he asks, "Is Christ divided?" In another place, he asks, "Can one limb of the physical body say to the other parts, 'I have no need of you'?" Yet isn't this exactly what we do every time we throw up a dividing line between ourselves and other true believers? I believe that most schisms in the body are caused by a misunderstanding of three very important Bible principles.

Misunderstanding of Worship

First, a misunderstanding of the nature of worship in Spirit and truth—true worship—contributes to schisms. Old covenant worship involved blood sacrifices—the giving of a life. New covenant worship involves a

living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). And living worship characterizes the Christian. The Christian's worship in Spirit and truth is in the believers' daily activities, such as caring for widows and orphans, and keeping themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). Living worship is neither the performance of prescribed rituals in the Sunday morning "worship services" nor is worship (as was under the old covenant) confined to a designated place at a designated time (John 4:20). New covenant worship is Christians obeying the "new commandment" given by Jesus, carrying one another's burdens, loving others as self, and thus loving God.

The idea of a new covenant "worship service," where "acts" of worship are performed, is an idea given to the Catholic world by the Catholic church and to the Protestant world by John Calvin. Sunday "worship services," generally, are legalistic efforts

patterned after a system that was abolished by Jesus. There is no example of the first Christians performing a Sunday "worship service" as we often experience today.

As long as people view their spirituality in terms of "corporate worship," they can reject one another over what should or what should not be done in the "corporate worship service." "Corporate worship service," by the way, is not a scriptural phrase. Regardless of our conclusions concerning true worship, we are commanded to "accept one another, as Christ accepted you, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

Misunderstanding of the New Covenant

Second, schisms are caused by a misunderstanding of the nature of the new covenant. A distinction needs to be made between the new covenant and the new covenant letters. The New Testament (covenant) and the new testament letters are not the same thing. The new covenant is simple. The simple can understand it. The new covenant (gospel) is centered around and totally focused on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. These are the facts to be believed. Those who require, as grounds for acceptance as Christians, belief in anything additional, are preaching "another gospel." To require the correct understanding of matters not related to this basic gospel is to make salvation dependent upon intellect. The free gift of salvation hangs on faith in the gospel of Jesus, and God is faithful to fulfill his covenant.

The new covenant or New Testament letters were written to people who were already saved. Twice in Titus 3:5-8, Paul refers to their salvation in the past tense, and again in Ephesians 2:8: "We *were* saved through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." These inspired letters were written to correct and sharpen the understanding of the recipients of the gospel, but it is not once

recorded that these letters were "the gospel." The new covenant letters are the God-breathed love letters that show us how to become more like Jesus. We should respect these inspired letters, and use them to mold our Christian lives.

To deny brotherhood to anyone who believes the gospel is to deny those who are God's children.

It is inconceivable that God, after announcing a "better covenant," would bring into effect another legal code filled with inferences and examples that would require legal experts to correctly draw conclusions in order for us to understand it.

The unity that Jesus prayed for is accomplished in obedience to the simple new covenant gospel. To deny brotherhood to anyone who believes this gospel is to deny those who are God's children. The theme of the new covenant letters is clearly seen to be otherwise: "Accept one another" (Romans 15:7). "Put up with one another" (Col. 3:13). "Love one another" (John 13:34). To love each other is the overwhelming message of the new covenant letters. Why would anyone wish to view them otherwise? Unity is the gift of God, and not a human feat. Our unity is based upon the person of Jesus, and not upon conformity to our opinions.

Misunderstanding of "Ecclesia"

Third, and possibly the most disruptive of peace and unity, is a misunderstanding of the nature of God's church. The word "church" is here used in the accommodative sense, because it does not translate the Greek word "ecclesia." The word "church" is a seventeenth century word used to

designate a religious organization. The Greek word "ecclesia" was used merely to designate a group or assembly and did not have a religious, ecclesiastical connotation.

For example, in Acts 19 "ecclesia" is used to describe an angry and confused mob of unbelievers. "Ecclesia" is a "people" word and Paul used it to refer to the saved in a given locality, not to an institution with independent entity. The Lord's ecclesia is not a corporate institution with corporate entity and a corporate name.

Yet by the seventeenth century the Church of England had evolved into a full-fledged denominational institution under the headship of King James. Under his authority the word "church" was used, instead of a non-ecclesiastical term such as "assembly," "group," or "family." By using a word which represented a religious organization, instead of a non-religious word, King James would have a scriptural example for the church over which he reigned. For additional enlightenment on this, read the introduction to the King James Bible.

The Holy Spirit did not assign a proper noun name to God's children but rather used descriptive terms or phrases, such as "assembly," "congregation," "family," "house," and others. The early Christian assemblers had organization, but they were not an organization.

But how does a misunderstanding of "ecclesia" cause schisms in the body? Because the same rationale that assumes a scripturally-ordained "church" must assume a scripturally ordained pattern of organization, pattern of corporate worship, and pattern of corporate work, which requires conclusions (ie. one communion cup or multiple,

musical instruments or a cappella, etc.). These conclusions are often used as excuses for rending the body of Christ. When believers section (sect) themselves away from other believers, they are being sectarian. Anything born of this sectarian spirit is a schism.

When Christians become organized, denominated, religious institutions, they also often run into conflict over the "chains of command" usually established. Jesus said, however, "It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:20-26). What shall not be so? In this context the mother was requesting positions of authority for her sons. However, no organizational power struggles should exist in God's kingdom because Jesus has all authority. To be great in the kingdom, one must become a servant.

Misunderstandings regarding what true worship, the new covenant, and the ecclesia actually *are*, contribute to much of the strife and division in the family of God. If you are

No organizational power struggles should exist in God's kingdom because Jesus has all authority.

a member of a religious schism that excludes any of God's children, that has a denominational name, that has entity separate and apart from its constituents, or has membership requirements in addition to the requirements for getting into God's kingdom, I encourage you to give serious consideration to changing it. Promote the Christ of the church and not the schism of your choice.

Neal Griffin is a retired school teacher, and has been an active member in the church for more than 40 years. He is happy to acknowledge that the writings of Harold Spurlock, Carl Ketcherside, and Charles Holt have influenced his own written reflections.

From Bitterness to Forgiveness: Theological Reflection on Congregational Reconciliation

CURTIS D. MCCLANE

Author's note: *This address was given on January 28, 1995, to a meeting of the entire congregation (after five families had left our congregation, including two elders and their families). The purpose of this gathering was to offer individuals an opportunity to ask questions and receive information as to why these families left and to reassure members that no "liberalism" was invading the church. The elders designed a special service (see program outline printed at the end of this article) and their prayer was that it be a meeting of healing and reconciliation.*

Perhaps it's true, as one person remarked, that often a congregation cannot grow and elders cannot lead until there is some form of "sanctified subtraction." We do believe that God's Spirit prevailed in this meeting and that the elders' vision was realized. Because of the positive outcome, I wanted to pass this model of congregational reconciliation to you as a resource for those inevitable times of conflict.

This past year has seen a lot of interpersonal conflicts and struggles within the life of this church. We are here today to exercise a Christian model of congregational reconciliation so that we can move from confusion, which led to bitterness, to forgiveness and clarity. It takes tremendous moral courage to learn from conflict instead of avoiding it or allowing it to be perceived in entirely negative terms, thus learning nothing from the experience.

In order for us to have a clear sense of what we are about this afternoon, I want to point out the direction we will be going. We want to look at biblical material from the writer of the Book of Hebrews, realize that conflicts are an opportunity for growth, discover what lessons we have learned as a congregation, and propose a vision for our future.

It is important to us, who are Christians, to be aware that when confusion and bitterness have arisen, forgiveness and healing are possible through the blood of Jesus Christ. This healing includes a clear conscience that involves an inner freedom of spirit toward God and others. The greatest single hindrance to gaining a clear conscience is that we focus on

blaming another person for an offense and how wrong they were and refuse to take responsibility for our own part.¹ "Our own part" consists of allowing God to use us as an instrument of healing when an offense has occurred. This begins by viewing forgiveness from God's point of view. So many things could be said about forgiveness, but I want to briefly mention two that apply to our situation.

Sorting Offense From Offender

First, forgiveness involves a positive attitude toward the offense rather than a negative attitude toward the offender. And second, forgiveness looks at the wounds of the offense as God's way of drawing attention to the offender's needs.²

Having a clear conscience in the midst of conflict is possible when we allow God to use us as an instrument of healing. This healing takes place when we offer forgiveness from the divine perspective. It is just this divine perspective that is found in an exhortation given by the writer of the book of Hebrews: "Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled."³ We are to persevere even in the face of emotional pain. We can face that wall of pain because there is a goal ahead of us that makes the suffering more bearable.⁴

God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are present here this afternoon in this assembly offering us the grace, peace, holiness, forgiveness, and purification that is necessary for this body of Christ to move forward.

Conflicts can be an opportunity for growth. Conflict resolution is seldom easy, but it is imperative if we profess the love of Christ in our heart. In order for our conflicts to be resolved, however, we must make the four following resolves:

1. I resolve not to be quarrelsome;
2. I resolve to accept responsibility for my role in our problem;
3. I resolve to accept you as you are; and
4. I resolve to forgive you.⁵

When we accept differences among ourselves as normal, we need not view conflict as contests of power or personalities. And often those differences are because of differing images people hold about what the church is and what it ought to be doing.⁶ In the process of resolving our own conflict in the midst of competing images regarding the nature, function and mission of the church, we must stress the ideal of the early church: one-mindedness. This involves willingness to yield our personal agendas for the good of the whole.⁷

What lessons have we learned as a congregation through this experience? They are numerous, but allow me to quickly suggest the following:

First, gossip can destroy a congregation. It is no doubt one of Satan's most potent weapons against Christians.

Second, unity is not based upon agreement on issues. Unity is created by God and

Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and it is our task to maintain it.

Third, it takes moral courage to admit we have been wrong. And such admission is a sign of strength and a tremendous example to other Christians.

Fourth, conflict can bring out the worst in all of us. If we do not have a healthy view and biblical model for resolving conflict, we will say and do things that we later regret.

Fifth, conflict can bring out the best in us. It is God's way of testing our character and helping us be sensitive to the areas in which we need to grow.

... the Greek word *koinonia* describes the steadfast fellowship between God and his sinful children.

And sixth, we have learned what the essence of fellowship is: "If our fellowship consists only in a relationship with people who are very much like us, we have reason to ask how the church is different from any other community."⁸ In the New Testament the Greek word *koinonia* describes the steadfast fellowship between God and his sinful children. We have fellowship with one another because God first has accepted us.⁹

I would like to propose a vision for our future. We need to explore the biblical teachings and implications of "Christian liberty." We need to create an atmosphere of trust once again in this congregation. It is a place where questions can be asked, traditions can be challenged, and individual Bible study encouraged. I envision a church where our tolerance is not a quiet, suspicious one, but one of trust with respect, especially when differing viewpoints are offered. I envision this congregation being guided by Holy Spirit-

filled men who are “servant leaders.” This means leaders who are familiar with the biblical models of servant leadership instead of the corporate models from our business world.

I envision this congregation loving and esteeming others better than ourselves. We are here to serve, love, and encourage one another. In the words of the Hebrews author: “Let mutual love continue.”¹⁰

Dr. Curtis D. McClane is a Minister of the Word and Pastoral Counselor for the Holmes Road Church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan, and is a member of the *Integrity* Board of Directors.

Notes

- 1 Bill Gothard, *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts: Research in Principles of Life*. (Oak Brook, IL: Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Publication, 1975), “Clear Conscience,” p.2.
- 2 Gothard, *Youth Conflicts*, “Personal Rights,” p. 1.
- 3 Hebrews 12:14, 15 (NRSV).
- 4 James Thompson, *Strategy for Survival: A Plan for Church Renewal from Hebrews* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1980), p. 109.
- 5 Durham, *Speaking from the Heart*, p. 113.
- 6 Carl S. Dudley, “Using Church Images for Commitment, Conflict, and Renewal,” in *Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform* (Atlanta, GA: John Know Press, 1988), edited by C. Ellis Nelson, p. 89.
- 7 C. Phillip Slate, “Managing Conflict in the Local Church,” in *Growing Through Conflict*, ed. by Jerry and Becky Gross (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1984) pp. 42, 43.
- 8 James Thompson, *Our Life Together: A Fresh Look at Christian Fellowship* (Austin, TX: SPC Publications, 1977), p. 143.
- 9 Thompson, *Our Life Together*, p. 13.
- 10 Hebrews 13:1 (NRSV).

Outline: Special Service for Congregational Reconciliation and Healing

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|---|--|
| <p>I. Welcome and Purpose of the Meeting</p> | <p>VII. Curtis speaks (5 min.)
Cleansing our conscience
Confession
Instruction on prayer requests</p> |
| <p>II. Devotional
2 Songs
Prayer</p> | <p>VIII. Write prayer requests</p> |
| <p>III. Elders
“Why we need to do something”
Your questions</p> | <p>IX. Prayers</p> |
| <p>IV. Quiet time to reflect and write questions
(hand in questions)</p> | <p>X. Song</p> |
| <p>V. 2 Songs</p> | <p>XI. Closing
This is a time of forgiveness and blessing.</p> |
| <p>VI. Elders respond to questions</p> | <p>XII. Refreshments in the fellowship room</p> |

A Proposal to the Church

JAY WILSON

The early churches which began from the preaching of Jesus were simply called Christians. They had no title or proper name. The collective body of Christians was referred to as: the church, the church of the first born, the church of God, churches of Christ, or the body of Christ. Local churches were referred to as “the church of the Thessalonians” or “the saints which are at Ephesus.” Never was a title or proper name assigned to God’s people which was to be used before or above any others.

If the first Christians were not given any “official” title or name, and if we are to use the letters sent to these early Christians (most of the New Testament) as our guide, then why have we adopted “official” names to be placed on our buildings, letterheads, and signboards? Not only have we adopted a special name, we have allowed our name to become synonymous with our fellowship and doctrine, and have made it a requirement of our particular religion.

Rather than be known by our fruit (Matthew 7:16) or by our love (John 13:35), we have rallied around and behind a name. The Holy Spirit is often replaced by the party spirit. Sometimes our coat of arms seems to be our name rather than the cross of Christ. Our method of identifying God’s people is often divisive and, yes, even unscriptural. Lines are drawn, barriers are erected, people are branded, thought is stifled, and communication is often completely stopped.

For a religious group to write their beliefs in an official creed book is dangerous. It says, in effect, “This is what we believe and only what we are going to believe. Our views are final and complete. We have the perfect understanding of all truth and here it is in this creed. Our minds are made up and there will be no further discussion.” But in the same way, a title seems to encapsulate this same kind of doctrine and/or creed. Perhaps a local identity, such as “The Hill Street Community Church,” would be more descriptive and would not fall under the category of a movement or a divisive title.

If we truly wish to speak where the Bible speaks and be New Testament Christians only, I suggest that we dispense with titles such as “Church of Christ, The Christian Church, The Church of God,” and hundreds of others, and use these terms only as descriptions, not titles. Taking the titles off of our car bumpers and from our buildings could:

- Contribute to a greater unification of all disciples of Christ
- Help lower the human-made walls of division
- Give congregations the autonomy they should have
- Encourage Christians to lean on each other as we lean on Jesus
- Foster greater independent study of the scriptures

Let’s consider these ideas and any others which promote unity among Christians instead of division.

Jay Wilson serves as an employee of Michigan Christian College in Rochester, Michigan.

Moving The Widow

MICHAEL M. ESCOUBAS

*In my Father's house are many rooms;
if it were not so I would have told you.*

(John 14:2)

The day was hot enough to melt steel.
They said, "The widow is poor, she can't
Have much to move." But, here is a bed,
There, a threadbare couch, a fish creel,

Assorted lamps, strings and bobbins, there,
A rusty, pull-a-long grocery cart.
In this room gather the scraps and heaps
Of a life parceled out like a deck of cards,

Deftly dealt and not all off the top.
Her life's fire, smothered to a flickering wink,
Will douse a cigarette in one more kitchen sink.
Time's encroachment calls forth in her a song

Of hope in life beyond life's final blink.
She suffered loss on loss: a grandchild's rape,
A son, with promise, dead of straight shots,
A self-made victim. The casket's cape

Of burnished bronze fit round him too young.
Do you think she ever waxed rage at him?
Did anything but fling prayers on wings to God
Bent on bony knee? No. Those prayers

Were her life-blood poured out. And when
The rape anniversary came, it caused a spell,
Like nails thudding through her flesh. She
Lived that twelve-year-old angel's pain.

Now she needs a walk-in place (no stairs)
Because breath comes today in heaves and gasps.
She used to drink in deep draughts of air. Her
Body is a curvature but not her spirit.

She never went mole-like into herself.
No. She always believed God sent Christ
To feel that child's rape and her own
Slower rape and to keep her spirit

Straight as her body was bent and spent
With time. The Mansion prepared is not
The one I am moving her to. Her next House
Will have rooms for the defiled angel-child

And the bourbon-laced son. Scripture teaches
That widows and weak ones own God's heart.
Sweat won't put God in my debt, but I will
Gladly move this Saint's pull-a-long cart.

Michael M. Escoubas works as a printer and typesetter in Bloomington, Illinois. He also serves as an elder in the College Park Christian Church/Church of Christ (independent Christian Church and non-instrumental Church of Christ which merged in March of 1971).

Book Review

In Search of Wonder: A Call to Worship Renewal
Edited by Dr. Lynn Anderson (Howard Publishing, 1995)

REVIEWED BY KATHLEEN BLAKELY

This book is not a "quick read," even though it is only 150 pages long. It's actually seven thoughtful essays on worship that take you from the doctrinal teaching of the Scriptures regarding worship to the practical application.

Any good study of worship begins with the person and nature of God. The first chapter is written by Mike Cope and is entitled "The God Who Is Worthy of Praise." Mike lays the doctrinal foundation for the discussion of human beings in worship which continues in the other essays.

Although it took me several days to reflect upon and assimilate the ideas and challenges presented in each chapter before moving on, it was time well spent. Each essay was filled with deep, thoughtful concepts worthy of careful consideration, such as Jack Reese's statement that worship is the time when "we encounter God in his world, not ours."

For any worship planner or leader, *In Search of Wonder* is more than a good resource. It is a deep, yet very readable volume which will cause you to reflect, read again, and examine your worship.

Kathleen Blakely's occupation is a Medical Claims Processor. A graduate of Great Lakes Christian College (Lansing, Michigan) she's also a part-time staff member at the South Redford Church of Christ (instrumental). Kathy's duties include Worship Leader, Planner and Children's Choir Director.