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Integrity

Editorial: Would I Have Missed Jesus?

Live Love

The Integrity Board

The Devil is in the Details

Larry Dotson

Is Baptism Necessary . . . One More Time

John W. Loftus

Who is My Enemy?

Joan Morrison

Book Review: Loosening Your Grip, by Harold Shank

Reviewed by William Vermillion

Readers' Response

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Would I Have Missed Jesus?

Would I have believed in Jesus as the Messiah if I had “been there?” Would I have been one of those who followed after him until he healed me or my loved one? Would I have extended my loyalty from my hometown rabbi to this new, young, radical Teacher who made me laugh? Would I have been one of those who became enamored with the miracles and the free lunches and missed Jesus’ astonishing-yet-scriptural message? Would I have been seeking God enough (as Anna and Simeon) to recognize that he was right here...in my neighborhood?

In the past I’ve felt a little superior to the Pharisees, who lacked the humility to accept Jesus as coming from God. I’ve been sure I wouldn’t do that. Yet I read in Luke 4 that it was ordinary Nazarene hometown folk (like me) who, when they discovered that their local boy was including the Gentiles in his good news message, were appalled! In fact, as a mob they indignantly pushed Jesus all the way out of town to the very edge of the cliff. At that very dramatic moment, did he turn around and face his townspeople? Did the old-timers suddenly recall the rumors of his and his cousin John’s birth? Did family friends remember the stories of the child Jesus teaching the Jerusalem rabbis or of how much he had grown up in the old neighborhood “in favor with God and the people?” Did anyone recall in that instant the ancient prediction that someone would be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles?” Something kept them from committing the final shove and “he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.”

Would I have been part of that pushy, rejecting crowd? What about today? Could I be so confident in my knowledge about God that I’m missing a bigger picture of God’s purpose being carried out in the world? Am I so loyal to one way of thinking that I may be closing my eyes and ears to God’s activities

(continued on page 15)

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Live Love

THE INTEGRITY BOARD

Love. It could well be a mistake to try to be too exact about love, but we should at least be grammatically correct. The dictionary is not very helpful in defining this wonderful word. Yes, you can use the word as a noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb, but love simply must mean more than “a zero score in tennis.” Many loves and lovers have been rejected, yet unresolved is a reasonable description of that with which the entire world is infatuated, but that eludes us all to some extent.

Love. This word must be about more than cuddly teddy bears, soft bunny rabbits, sweet music, and frilly hearts. Where should we go to gain understanding? To a friend or relative? To an attractive individual of the opposite sex? A computer matching service? These choices often disappoint.

Love. When many of us were very young we learned God is Love. We also observed that people who knew that simple truth often acted lovingly, which made this uncommon commodity attractive. To turn a phrase, “We loved it!”

Love. Sonnenberg said, “Love is the road to God; for love, endless love, is Himself.”

Love. When in the awful darkness of despair over a broken engagement, George Matheson wrote: “O love, that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee. I give Thee back the life I owe, that in Thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.”

Love. Forget the dictionary—look in the Book! Listen as John helps us get our

bearings during this season of Love:

God is love. If we keep on loving others, we will stay one in our hearts with God, and he will stay one with us. If we truly love others and live as Christ did in this world, we won’t be worried about the day of judgment. A real love for others will chase those worries away. The thought of being punished is what makes us afraid. It shows that we have not really learned to love. We love God because God loved us first. But if we say we love God and don’t love each other, we are liars. We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don’t love the people we can see? The two commandments that God has given us are: Love God and love each other! (1 John 4:16-21, Bible For Today’s Family)

Love must be put into practice, so if you want a verb to conjugate, you cannot do better than to take the verb “to love”—I loved, I was loved, I love, I am loved, I shall love, I shall be loved. A small boy defined love as the perfect of live. His definition is strictly non-grammatical, but it is sound psychologically.

Love. Your God-given love, expressed to us in our publishing ministry, means more than you will ever understand. Thank you for loving all of us involved in Integrity in the name of the Author of love.

The Integrity Team Loves You!

The Devil is in the Details

LARRY DOTSON

We wish to take the New Testament out of the abuses of the clergy and put it into the hands of the people. And to do this is no easy task, as the clergy have formed the opinions of nine-tenths of Christendom before they could form an opinion of their own.—Alexander Campbell

While glancing through the local newspaper, I recently came across a news item that caught my eye and caused me to reflect on the irony of its headline: “Three Arrested for Crimes at the Churches.” The reason I found it ironic is because I believe there are crimes being committed at churches all the time for which no arrests will ever be made. These crimes involve promoting a gospel other than the one “in which the righteousness of God is revealed” (Rom. 1:17). Some of the perpetrators espouse a humanistic gospel which makes Jesus the one way for some but not the only way for all, while others are advocates for a hermeneutical gospel which makes the way to salvation and the bond of unity dependent upon the details of religion.

There would never have been a “Restoration Movement” had certain men not grown weary of the bitterness and strife caused by the details of religion. In outlining the fundamental principles of a plan for unity that was adopted by Barton W. Stone and others associated with the Cane Ridge Revival, the man credited with drawing that plan wrote:

One thing I know, that wherever non-essentials are made terms of communion, it will never fail to have a tendency to disunite and scatter the church of Christ . . . It appears that too many have

viewed the Bible as the statesman does the Constitution, as that upon which they are to frame laws. . . . It is a truth self-evident to the Christian that nothing is a sin but what the Scriptures forbid, and nothing a duty but what they enjoin . . . nor shall we see Christianity in its native beauty, until it appears in the white garments of the gospel alone, stripped of all the filthy rags of Human Invention.¹

About that same time, Thomas Campbell incurred the wrath of his religious party when he began to “relax too much the rigidness of their ecclesiastical rules, and to cherish for other denominations feelings of fraternity and respect.” In his defense he proposed to those who eventually forced him out of that Presbyterian sect a question that remains as relevant today as then:

For what error or immorality ought I to be rejected, except it be that I refuse to acknowledge as obligatory upon myself, or to impose upon others, anything as of Divine obligation for which I cannot produce a “Thus saith the Lord”?²

There have been many since then who have misused that question as it relates to Christian unity. What it calls into question is imposing upon others things that the Bible itself doesn’t impose. It doesn’t suggest that those who do things for which there is no specific biblical command or example are, necessarily, in error and unworthy of fellowship.

Thirty-one years after Thomas Campbell refused to include inferences, deductions, and the details of religion in his vision of

unity, his son reiterated the simple theme of that movement: “We, as a denomination, are as desirous as ever to unite and cooperate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting covenant.”³

During a subsequent debate, he elaborated on these principles:

We have one faith, one Lord, one baptism, but various opinions. . . . We do, indeed, receive to our communion persons of other denominations who will take upon them the responsibility of their participating with us. . . . All these persons, of so many and so contradictory opinions, weekly meet around our Lord’s table. . . . Our bond of union is faith in the slain Messiah, in his death for our sins, and his resurrection for our justification. Therefore, we acknowledge nothing among us but Christ, and him crucified.⁴ Alexander Campbell, “Campbell-Rice Debate,” A. T. Skillman and Son, Lexington, 1844, p. 785.

Among the non-instrument Churches of Christ, religious leaders have depended upon extrabiblical details in order to define and establish parameters for fellowship with regard to the church, baptism, and worship. For example, the Bible refers to the church at Pentecost simply as those who “gladly received” Peter’s message about Jesus and were baptized (Acts 2:41). The New Testament writers did not focus on “terms of entrance” into the church or “how to find the church” because their message to the world was not about the church. Can we even imagine that the Apostle Paul endured imprisonments, beatings, stonings, and shipwrecks because of his desire to proclaim to the world the message that “one must be a member of that of which Christ is the savior

in order to be saved?” Has it not come full circle from Pentecost where being added to the church was the *result* of being saved to the point where some are conditioned to believe that being in the church is the *cause* of salvation?

Baptism as a response to the gospel is an undeniable New Testament reality, but to insist that baptism is the way that people “contact” the blood of Christ, “call on” the name of the Lord, and “receive” the gift of salvation, is speaking where the Bible hasn’t spoken. Our religious leaders maintain that we can fellowship others only if they have the same understanding of baptism that we do, even though the Bible itself prescribes only one test to measure this understanding: “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:37). Nor did those who gave us the restoration movement share such a divisive attitude toward baptism that many do today:

I know some will say that the candidate which they immersed a second time did not rightly understand baptism the first time. Well, I am persuaded they did not understand it the second time; and shall they be baptized a third time? But did all the believers whom the Apostles baptize understand their baptism in all its designs, meanings, and bearings? We presume not, else the Apostle need not have written to them to explain it (Rom. 6). . . . He that insists upon a person being rebaptized in order to fellowship, makes his own inferences a bond of union, and adds to the commandments written in the book.⁵

Perhaps nowhere are the details of religion more apparent than when it comes to “worship in spirit and truth.” For example, those who make melody in their hearts

while instruments are being played are often compared to Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah, as though there is a parallel between the “thou shalt nots” that were transgressed by those men (Ex. 30:9, Num. 4:15) and Paul’s guidance to the early church on how to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:15-19) as evidence that they had put on the “new self” (Col. 3:10-16).

I believe the New Testament teaches that the “truth” of our worship is a person, not a pattern, and that true worship involves drawing near to that person and is not defined in the context of certain specified outward “acts.” After all, the Bible tells us that the Apostle Paul, who observed Jewish customs and traditions, reasoned with the Jews in the synagogues, not over the propriety of their “worship services,” but over the truth found in Jesus.

If there is one thing the Bible makes clear, it is that the gospel of the kingdom is the good news about the king (I Cor. 15:1-11). The New Testament reveals the gospel, but it is not the gospel. Baptism is a response to the gospel, but it is not

the gospel. Worship in spirit and truth is a remembrance of the gospel, but it is not the gospel. And a plan of salvation that has embellished all these things with the details of religion and institutionalized them to the point they have become the gospel, is still not the gospel.

I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord. What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen (Acts 20:24; I Cor. 9:16, 15:2; 2 Tim. 1:8, 13; 2 Tim. 2:14).

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End Notes

- 1 Rice Haggard, “An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name,” 1804, p. 18, 23-25, 29-31.
- 2 Thomas Campbell, Letter to the Associate Synod of North America, 1807.
- 3 Alexander Campbell, “Campbell-Rice Debate,” A. T. Skillman and Son, Lexington, 1844, p. 785.
- 4 Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. IV, 1840, p. 556
- 5 Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. VI, 1842, p. 327.

Is Baptism Necessary . . . One More Time

JOHN W. LOFTUS

I’ve received several negative responses to my previous article titled: “Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?” Some thought I was offering a promise of salvation to those who refuse to be baptized. But this simply missed what I was saying. I thought I stated quite clearly that the message of salvation includes baptism, and this

is what we tell those who desire to be saved. I dealt strictly with the issue of the unbaptized believer and how God would respond to such a person on judgment day. As far as I can tell, there are any number of positions to take on baptism. The following chart offers a comparison of four views:

Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4
<i>Included in our preaching?</i>			
Baptism	Baptism	Baptism	Baptism not included
<i>Why is it required?</i>			
To be saved	To be saved	To identify with Christ	Cultural symbol
<i>What happens to those who don’t do it?</i>			
They are lost	Don’t know	They can still be saved	Not that important

While there are other positions on baptism, my position is closest to number 3 above. In my previous article I was arguing against Position 1 above, and while I at least understand Position 2, I will argue against that view shortly. I do not hold to Position 4.

A “Cluster” of Responses

My articulation of the third position comes from Virgil Warren’s writings. He speaks of “a cluster” of responses to God’s offer of salvation in Christ, which in turn restores our relationship to God and allows us to receive the gifts that come with that restored relationship. Taken together these responses identify us with Christ on an interpersonal level. He writes: “Repentance, faith, and baptism are not three things, but aspects of one whole response: repentant faith expressed in baptism. The total response identifies a person with Jesus

Christ. Identity with Christ is the basic condition for the natural set of gifts that form one whole consequence: restored relationship.”

“There is one issue—interpersonal relationship, one condition—personal identity with Christ, and one consequence—reconciliation between persons.”¹

Because we have adopted a legal-versus-interpersonal system for understanding baptism, Warren charges that “Christian baptism gets transformed into something akin to a business transaction with the feel of (a) automatic and (b) uniform results.” Hence, “a repentant believer committed to Jesus Christ might die without baptism through some misunderstanding or insuperable circumstance. His situation gets interpreted as being like the case where someone has not filled out properly all the right documents for a passport, or like a case where someone becomes a traffic

fatality on the way to signing for a sizable life insurance policy.” By contrast, in an interpersonal system, Warren writes, “Formal matters like baptism can even be overlooked entirely for legitimate, practical reasons. Paul observed this principle when he says of circumcision in its spiritual dimension: ‘If then the uncircumcised keeps the ordinances of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?’” (Romans 2:26)²

Warren continues by claiming,

We are not dealing with a God who is trying to see how many people he can send to hell; so we do not expect condemnation on a technicality or condemnation because the ‘paperwork’ did not get done in time. . . . What is really necessary is identification in Christ, and God has commanded baptism as the formal way of doing that.” But “the identity with Christ, not the act that identifies us with Christ, is what provides the basis for salvation.”³

In another context (including but not limited to baptism), Warren speaks about honest misunderstanding in formal matters, and he argues that such misunderstanding “should not be categorized with intentional disobedience in interpersonal matters. In respect to honest misunderstanding we take it that God looks on the heart and knows people’s intentions.” And while sincerity does not save us, “hopefully it does make us forgivable. Misaction based on honest misunderstanding is still misaction, but something can be erroneous without being reckoned against us. Errors are not reckoned till knowledge comes (Romans 7:9-10; Rom. 3:25; 4:15; 5:13; Acts 17:30-31) at which time the repentance-forgiveness process comes into play.”⁴

When Baptism Becomes Legalistic

I turn now to the major objection some have with my claim that “baptism is not necessary for salvation in a legalistic fashion.” This objection is phrased something like this:

- 1) “God commanded baptism in order to receive salvation, so you do not have the authority to change his command.”
- 2) “Moreover, what God says cannot be changed because God is unchanging and his word is eternally true.”

In regard to the first objection: by admitting that people can be saved without being baptized it is true that I am commenting on something God didn’t comment on, speaking where he didn’t speak, making a claim that he didn’t make. I admit this. Yet I think we do this all of the time. Anytime we deal with an issue that God didn’t deal with, we are doing this. For instance, there are a great many ethical issues that the Bible doesn’t strictly speak to. Where in the Bible is a direct discussion of the morality of nuclear war, socialism, contraception, euthanasia, gambling, genetic engineering, surrogate mothering, suicide, civil lawsuits in a democracy, and so on? There are a host of ethical issues, apologetical issues, and theological issues on which the Bible simply does not speak directly—issues too numerous to list. Yet, when confronted with these issues, we must make decisions about them based upon inferences and deductions from Scriptural premises.⁵

The objection, of course, is that God has spoken regarding baptism and that the message is clear. So by speaking otherwise, I am changing what he so clearly stated. To the contrary, I claim that God didn’t speak to the issue of the unbaptized believer. He didn’t do so precisely because there weren’t any such people in the early church. Every

believer was a baptized believer. This is Paul’s assumption in Romans 6, because at that point in his discussion Paul was finished speaking about God’s gift of salvation and our response of faith. In Romans 6, Paul uses baptism to illustrate the effects of salvation, something every believer in his day had done.

The argument that I’m making is similar to the one claiming that the Bible didn’t speak directly to the kind of dehumanizing slavery that existed just prior to the Civil War. It’s clear that the Bible doesn’t outrightly condemn slavery, so the argument goes, because the slavery in biblical times was different; it was more “humane.” The slavery in biblical times could be the result of the spoils of war, but it could also be voluntarily chosen, or a form of punishment for non-payment of a debt—something socially acceptable. At the very least, it did not deny the full personhood of slaves. By contrast, our country in the nineteenth century denied black people the status of personhood. Slavery in our era could be much more brutal. But if American slavery were very different from slavery in biblical days, then the Bible didn’t speak directly to the issue of American slavery. Therefore, the anti-slavery movement turned instead toward principles found in the Bible that condemned it, like the brotherhood of man (cf. Acts 17:26).⁶

There is nothing wrong in doing this. Jesus himself regularly claimed that certain Scripture verses did not directly apply to the ethical and/or theological issues before him. The “sermon on the mount” is an example of this. Overall it is a sustained argument that seeks to show that the Pharisees of his day misapplied the text of the Old Testament in life and teaching.⁷ Then, too, Jesus’ controversy over the Sabbath day is mainly an argument over the applicability of certain biblical texts to certain

situations. Jesus maintained that these texts didn’t apply legalistically to the particular issues at hand.

Likewise, in the case of Christian baptism, the whole issue depends entirely upon whether or not the New Testament speaks directly to the issue of the unbaptized believer. I simply maintain that it does not do so. The fact that I believe this is not changing God’s commandment at all, for there isn’t anything to change. I do believe, however, that there are biblical principles that speak indirectly to this issue, which force me to conclude that “baptism is not necessary for salvation in a legalistic fashion.”

Is God Flexible?

Let me now turn to the second major objection to my position: that “what God says cannot be changed because God is unchanging and his word eternally true.” The view of the immutability of God is presently undergoing a revision by non-Calvinists, among whom I count myself. The Calvinistic doctrine teaches that God cannot change at all. I believe this doctrine comes from the Greek philosopher Plato, who argued that God must be an eternally perfect being so that any change in God must by definition be a change for the worst. Now it is true that God is described as unchanging (Ex. 3:14-15; 34:6-7; Numbers 23:19; Psalms 33:11; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). But what does it mean to say this? Christians agree that God’s nature and character do not change. But do these verses require more of God than that? Does God know of no change whatsoever? God is described as changing in several passages (Gen. 6:6-7; Ex. 32:10-14; Deut. 9:13-25; I. Sam. 15:11; Psalms 106:44-45; Jer. 18:7-10; Joel 2:13; Amos 7:3; Jonah 3:10).

Along with many other non-Calvinists, I deny that God is the sort of being Plato said he was. He is not a Platonic idea, law, or static Being out there who cannot adapt to new situations and human choices. I would affirm that God is a loving person (1 John 4:8), and it is the essence of love to be flexible and to change in response to the ones to whom love sets its affection. A static God who cannot change in response to us cannot be a loving God. Instead he remains an aloof judge or rule-setting potentate. A loving father, on the other hand, is something quite different. So I maintain that we either serve a dynamic God or we don't serve a God of love at all.⁸

The Calvinistic doctrine of God's immutability is blown apart in the incarnation of Christ. God-in-Christ revealed himself as one who enjoys relationships, makes decisions, acts upon plans, and has deep

The Calvinistic doctrine of God's immutability is blown apart in the incarnation of Christ.

feelings. The parables of the lost coin, lost sheep and lost son indicate a God who knows both loss and discovery, joy and sorrow. We also see him deal creatively with each person he meets.

This more correct understanding about God doesn't lead us to the conclusion that God doesn't mean what he says. On the contrary, what God says is eternal, and his word is ever true (Matt. 24:35). But what it does suggest is that he is a true Person, and this involves being flexible with his people. That is, while his overall will for us doesn't change, because his nature and character are immutable, his methods do change. He adapts to our feeble efforts to please him, he is flexible with us because of our capri-

ciousness, and he is compassionate with our shortcomings. This is his grace.

In the Old Testament we see God being flexible with people on the issue of divorce. Jesus said that it was because of the hardness of their hearts that an exception granting divorce was allowed by God (Matt. 19:8).⁹ Yes, God was not pleased to allow such an exception, but, and here's the extremely important point for our purposes, he allowed/tolerated it because of his love for his people. They didn't follow his intended rules, but God made allowances for this because he loved them and didn't want to make life unbearable for them.

God also allowed/tolerated the eye for an eye, tooth for tooth principle of revengeful judicial punishment (Ex. 21:23-25; Matt. 5:38-39). Apparently, such a limiting principle actually saved lives since many people of that day undertook revenge on every member of a particular family for a particular offense. The eye for an eye principle ends up legitimizing a brutal and uncivilized kind of punishment because it was more "humane" than the barbaric kind of punishment meted out by ancient people. In the Gospels, Jesus stressed a love for one's enemies that would eventually undercut such a barbaric kind of revengeful punishment among civilized societies. God accommodates to us with his commands; this, too, is his grace. He deals as a Person to persons.

In the New Testament, Jesus demanded all or nothing when it came to following him; but he certainly tolerates less. Jesus demanded an all or nothing approach to possessions: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Luke 12:33), and "you cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24). Yet, most people in his day and our own do not obey this. Jesus further stated that the cost of being a disciple involves being willing to "hate his father and mother,

his wife and his children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life." Otherwise, Jesus continued, "he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). Whom would you suggest has obeyed this command fully in his or her heart? Even if you can find people who have done this to a great degree, it doesn't mean that Christ rejects those who don't have this complete commitment. The reason, again, is because of his gracious love and mercy.

He loves us and accepts us where we are in our commitments and understandings. This is exactly what it means to love. There is no contradiction in God's demanding everything but accepting less. This is the point at which God's holiness meets his grace, where God's commandments meet humankind's disobedience, and where God's desires meet people's actions.

God and the Unbaptized Believer

So let's grant the entirely biblical view that God commanded baptism for salvation. How would he lovingly respond to the situation we presently face with wide divergence of opinion in the denominational world over baptism? What exactly would God do about the person who was misinformed about baptism by a denominational preacher, and who didn't have the intellectual muscle to see through that teaching? Would God hold a person accountable for not being able to think through the arguments of such a preacher, when this is the only thing he's ever been taught?

Someone might simply respond by charging that baptism is clearly stated in the New Testament, and I agree. But then we must ask: If it is so clearly stated in the New Testament, then why have a majority of Christians gotten it wrong, both in the past and the present? I don't have an answer for this. I do know that we think footwashing

is cultural, and so is greeting one another with a kiss. We reinterpret what a woman should be wearing in church on her head, and whether or not we should sell all our possessions and give to the poor. Many denominational church leaders think this way about baptism, and we think they are wrong. But will God actually punish someone eternally simply because they are wrong

... if any of us were to judge a committed but unimmersed believer, it would be a no-brainer—we would show mercy.

on this? The answer, I believe, that is the most biblical, reasonable and loving is that he would accept/tolerate their ignorance on this issue provided they longed to follow him with their heart and sought to obey all that they knew God to command. He demands baptism but he would lovingly accept the other committed believers in Christ.

Some would disagree by saying, "We simply don't know whether or not they'll be saved—they have no guarantee of salvation." I understand this. But didn't Jesus compare our love with God's when he said that if we know how to give a loaf of bread to our children when they ask for it, then how much more will God give us that which we ask for? (Matt. 7:9-11) In other words, our love for our children is something like God's love for us, except that God's love is much more than that. So if any of us were to judge a committed but unimmersed believer, it would be a no-brainer—we would show mercy. So I ask: if we humans would extend mercy, then how much more would a loving God be willing to do so?

God is Holy (Isaiah 6:3). This is true. But the biblical God does not have a Pharisaic or legalistic kind of holiness (cf. Matt. 5:20). This is something Jesus battled against most forcefully in the Sabbath Day controversy. Jesus taught that it was okay to break the Sabbath law in order to save someone out of a pit, and likewise to heal simply because people were more important than mechanical obedience to laws (cf. Matt. 12:1-14). It is here Jesus quoted from Hosea 6:6, in which God says: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." I think it's fair to say with Jesus that God is much more interested in our character (our "mercy") than in being punctiliously obedient in the outward observance of baptism (our "sacrifice").

A legalist is someone who stresses the letter of the law: "Be baptized or else be damned." I simply reject the notion that a holy God must by definition be a legalist. I follow the principle laid down by Jesus who stated that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). I would preach baptism, but in following this principle, baptism would not be allowed to be a legalistic stumbling block in the way of human need—in this case, a restored relationship with God. To paraphrase Jesus here, "Baptism was made for man, not man for baptism."

I simply reject the notion that a holy God must by definition be a legalist.

So again I ask, knowing what we know about God, would he really withhold salvation from people for whom he died merely because they were misinformed about baptism? With all of the sins we have as

Christians, I think God has much bigger problems to deal with than whether or not we've been baptized (cf. 1 & 2 Corinthians; Revelation 2-3). And if his grace isn't active before conversion leading us to him, then how would we come to him in the first place (John 6:44)? And why would he withhold his mercy and love from us because we failed to do an act that neither feeds the poor, nor helps a neighbor in distress—things which he surely is more concerned that we do (James 1:27; Matt. 25:31-46)?

Evidence of God's Blessing

Those who disagree on this remind me of the people who argued with Paul and Barnabas at the first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Here they were debating whether to accept Gentiles into the church who were not circumcised. They made their arguments and counter-arguments. Paul's argument, however, included personal experience and testimony that he had witnessed God giving Gentile believers the Holy Spirit, and that God "purified their hearts by faith" (vs. 9). In the midst of their debate it says that "the whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them" (vs. 12). The irony is that those who disagreed with Paul were claiming that God wouldn't accept uncircumcised Gentiles, when God was already doing so!

Likewise, our discussion about whether God will save sincere but unimmersed believers needs to stop and examine the testimony of what God is doing around the world in the lives of people. I have met many such people and heard their testimonies. I have been affected in my view of baptism by attending Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Marquette Univer-

sity, and meeting what appeared to be believing students and teachers who were unimmersed. I have attended philosophical lectures and debates where Christianity was defended by believing philosophers who

I cannot deny what I have experienced in seeing people who were obviously touched by God, yet not baptized.

probably were unimmersed, and I have read their writings. I have been affected by listening to some musical artists like Steve Green and others who lead me to God even though I have no idea as to whether they have been baptized or not. I have read the writings of Charles Colson, James Dobson, and others who don't see it as essential. Seeing the number of lives that have been changed by Billy Graham rallies and meeting some of those people have affected my understanding. So also has my being involved in pro-life causes and rallies, and the Promise Keepers, none of which views baptism as an important doctrine. I cannot deny what I have experienced in seeing people who were obviously touched by God, yet not baptized. Mine was one of them prior to baptism.

Then, too, I've done a lot of reading of some great defenders of the faith in Christian history who were apparently unimmersed. There are also long-standing denominations whose official teaching and practice allows infant baptism.

Before I finish, let me quote from someone who took a very strong public stand on the clear teaching about baptism, and yet personally believed that sincere, unimmersed people were Christians. He wrote:

Who is a Christian? . . . I cannot make any one duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their knowledge and consent, as aliens from Christ and the well-grounded hope of heaven.

Should I find a paedobaptist more intelligent in the Christian Scriptures, more spiritually-minded and more devoted to the Lord than . . . one immersed on a profession of faith, I could not hesitate a moment in giving the preference of my heart to him that loveth most. Did I act otherwise, I would be a pure sectarian, a Pharisee among Christians . . . I do not substitute one commandment, for universal or even general obedience. And should I see a sectarian Baptist or a paedobaptist more spiritually minded, more generally conformed to the requisitions of the Messiah, than the one who precisely acquiesces with me in the theory or practice of immersion as I teach, doubtless the former rather than the latter, would have my cordial approbation and love as a Christian. So I judge and so I feel. It is the image of Christ the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known . . ."¹¹

The author of the above letter was Alexander Campbell. According to James

DeForest Murch, this was a position he reiterated in columns of the *Millennial Harbinger* and quoted extensively from *The Christian Baptist* and other published works to show that he had always held to this position.¹²

Barton Stone, the other leader in the

Stone-Campbell movement, would go beyond a mere personal statement on the issue. He favored fellowship on an equal basis between the immersed and the unimmersed in Christian churches, thus “making Christian character the sole test of fellowship.”

Notes

- 1 Virgil Warren, “The Interpersonal Nature of Christian Baptism,” *Christian Standard*, Jan. 7 & 14, 1990.
- 2 Virgil Warren, “A Position Statement on the Meaning of Christian Baptism.” As far as I can tell this paper is unpublished, but similar statements can be found in his “Concepts and Practices Foreign to Christian Baptism,” *Christian Standard*, July 22 & 29, 1990.
- 3 Virgil Warren, “A Position Statement. . .” See also his “Understanding Christian Ordinances,” a paper delivered at the Open Forum in Indianapolis March 15, 1989, and his book, *What the Bible Says about Baptism*, (College Press, 1982), pp. 194-409.
- 4 Virgil Warren, “Central to Less Central: An Interpersonal Format for Prioritizing Issues in Christian Unity,” *Christian Standard*, September 4, 1988.
- 5 Thomas Campbell in the *Declaration and Address* (Proposition 6) admitted that “inferences and deductions from scriptural premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word. . .”
- 6 The modern argument on behalf of homosexuality depends on the same kind of argument. This argument is based on claim that the Bible does not speak directly toward a loving monogamous relationship for life between two persons of the same sex. Sound hermeneutics admit such a possible argument. Those who would argue against homosexuality cannot merely quote Scripture verses unless they deal seriously with the claim that the Bible is only condemning gratuitous homosexual lascivious acts. My own attempt at arguing against homosexuality takes their argument seriously and offers a critique of it. You can find my response in *The Gospel Unashamed*, October 1991, published by George Faull, 540 Road Bus. 31 South, Peru, IN 46970.
- 7 That is why Jesus is seen stressing his strong belief in biblical authority before the statements that followed. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17-20). Jesus knew that he had to stress biblical authority because the Pharisees would think that by denying their understandings, he would be denying God’s word.
- 8 For an introduction to this non-Calvinistic kind of thinking see Clark H. Pinnock & Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love*, Downers Grove: IVP, 1994. While it still has its problems, see also *The Openness of God* by Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, and Basinger, Downers Grove: IVP, 1994. To be fair, one doesn’t need to accept this point in order to think God is flexible and accommodating to us. I fail to see, though, how an inflexible and completely unchanging Being can be a father to his children.
- 9 While Jesus informs us that it was Moses who permitted this exception, it would be incorrect to read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and conclude anything else but that Moses was speaking by God’s authority.

- 10 Those who deny experience in assessing the status of the unbaptized believer are throwing the baby out with the bath water. Paul’s experience of conversion was itself a powerful argument for the truth of Christianity (Acts 9, 22, 26). While experience is not the test for truth, *our understanding of the truth must be able to explain personal experience*. I cannot stress this truth too much. Experience has always been a check on exegesis, whether it comes to Wesleyan perfectionism, perseverance of the saints, second coming predictions, Pentecostal miracle workers, parenting, and so on. The whole science/religion discussion is an attempt to harmonize the Bible with what scientists have experienced through *empirical* observations of the universe. According to James Sire in *The Universe Next Door* (IVP, 1988, p. 214-217), one of the tests to judge world views is whether they comprehend the data of reality—data of all types. Likewise, for our purposes here, the data that must be comprehended within the Restoration Movement is the experience of thousands upon thousands of unimmersed believing people who have had the same experience of God as we. That they do have the same experience can’t be denied, as far as any outsider can tell anything of someone else’s experience—*except that I am not an outsider to such an experience before baptism*.
- 11 From his famous “Lunenburg Letter” quoted by James DeForest Murch in *Christians Only* (Standard Publishing, 1962), p. 118.
- 12 At this juncture I’m reminded that in Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* (Proposition #3) we read 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.” If I’m correct that the New Testament doesn’t expressly teach about unbaptized believers, then by Campbell’s own standards what I conclude in this area is not something that should receive censure—it falls into the area of liberty.
- 13 James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only*, p. 119.

John W. Loftus is an adjunct instructor of philosophy for Kellogg Community College in Battle Creek, MI, and Tri-State University in Angola, IN. Great Lakes Christian College no longer employs John’s services in their Leadership Institute Classes.

Editorial

continued from page 2

in other circles? More seriously, could I actually be missing the presence of God himself?

During Jesus’ historical visit to earth, both the religious leaders and ordinary folk were startled by what God was really like. Although the Messiah’s purpose was predictable: “bring good news to the poor,” “release the captive and oppressed,” and “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” how Jesus carried out these prophecies was unpredictable. To the curious crowds, his

behavior was much like the wind, which “blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8a). Those who had “ears to hear” opened their hearts and minds to a greater love than they had understood before. These new followers experienced renewal and freedom as Jesus fulfilled his mother’s early prophecy that her child would “scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts” and “lift up the lowly” (Luke 1:51b, 52b). One of the

saddest statements in the Bible was made by Luke in reference to the Pharisees and religious law experts. They believed they knew exactly how the Messiah would appear, how he would think, exactly how he would carry out his ministry. Yet because their minds resisted John the Baptist's preparatory message to repent, and were inflexible to any other messianic scenarios than their own, they ended up "rejecting God's purpose for themselves" (Luke 7:30) and missing their savior.

I might have done the same thing then. I don't want to do it now. Perhaps we could all pray that the Lord keep our minds and

Who Is My Enemy?

JOAN MORRISON

Last summer I visited the town of Diekirch, Luxembourg, and its historical museum. Diekirch was part of the Battle of the Bulge fought between the United States and its allies against Germany, who was occupying the country of Luxembourg at that time. This Battle was fought from December 16, 1944 to January 16, 1945, after which the allies succeeded in liberating the people of Luxembourg from German occupation.

Diekirch and its museum are part of several monuments throughout Luxembourg erected by a grateful populace. Over 5,000 American military are buried in Hamm, ten miles south, including General George Patton, the leader of that war effort.

The Diekirch museum, established by European and American business people, has over three floors of war mementos, photos, equipment, dioramas, and artifact displays. Scenes depict Germans, French,

hearts open and flexible so that we can enjoy and praise him for all the good he is accomplishing wherever people open the door to him.

Now to him
who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish
abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus to all
generations,
forever and ever. Amen. (Eph.3:20,21)

—Diane G. H. Kilmer, Co-editor

Luxembourgers, Belgians, as well as Americans. To me, the entire content of the museum was engrossing and thought-provoking, and had a sobering and solemn impact.

One of the displays contained a letter written by an American soldier, describing his experiences in a village of Luxembourg, and calling Germans "krauts" and "jerries." Yet when I looked at photographs of Germans lying frozen in the snow at the battlefield, and the Germans depicted in displays and dioramas, they looked like many Americans—just human beings. In fact, Germany is the ancestral home of some of my own family. Possibly some of my own distant relatives were in those photos, lying wounded and defeated in battle.

I wondered how Germans felt when they looked on these pictures and displays, as they surely do since their border is only a few miles from this museum. What do they think when they read the kind of name-

Integrity

calling in the letter from the American soldier which contributed to separating us humans?

Back in 1941-45, during the second World War, Krauts and Jerries were the enemy—ugly, faceless images that dared to follow Hitler's political ideas of conquest, destruction and murder. I was a young teenager then. Through the newspaper, radio, and movies, we in the U.S. were constantly exposed to images of Germans as unfeeling, stunted in their relating and communicating—humanoids—animals to be fought and feared and destroyed. I couldn't imagine them as being like our clean-cut, civilized American young men in any way.

The First Mistake

The mistake that the Germans made was to follow Hitler, who believed in hate. "You must learn how to hate!" Adolf Hitler admonished Henrietta von Schirach, wife of the governor of Vienna, in 1943, when she protested Nazi treatment of Jews at an Amsterdam rail station. "Hitler's hate, fully armed, exploded as World War II, the most destructive event in history. In Europe, some 50 million men, women, and children perished . . ." (*National Geographic*, Dec. 1991).

We Americans are not above making the same mistake. In the mid-1800s, for example, American military leaders sometimes carried out carnage and atrocities on the Native Americans. In 1862 they massacred Native American men, women, and children at Sand Creek, with the blessing of the American public . . . just because they were "Indians." It seems to be easy to be misled by people in power. In a story about Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians recently pub-

lished in the *Columbus Dispatch*, this statement emphasized the importance of leadership: "Ethnic hatred is not some unstoppable force of nature, but often is a crude tool used by political leaders to gain their own ends. Only other political leaders can stop them." Christianity could also be a great, civilizing force if people would be led to follow the principle: "You must learn how to love!" Leroy Garrett, in a recent issue of *Last Time Around*, mentions that the secular and the sacred merged when he attended grand jury duty. It would, of course, because "it is all God's world and it is all sacred, however flawed." Romans 12 seems to uphold this merger Garrett refers to when it says that "the authorities that exist have been established by God."

Therefore, in order to be responsible Christians, we must take extreme care in who we select as our leaders. We must choose people who will encourage thoughtful and fair treatment of all humans, no matter what their ethnicity. In Germany's case, back at some point in time the German people and their politicians allowed Hitler to direct their minds and their country toward hatred. Let us beware of this possibility among our own government officials and elected leaders. As Christians, let us do whatever it takes to elect good leaders. However, as Christians, we can also preach and live out tolerance and acceptance of our fellow citizens, whether black, Asian, Hispanic, German, Italian, East European, Jewish, homosexual, women, poor, AIDS victims, Native Americans, East Indian, Anglo, French, of other religions, different, liberal or conservative brethren, etc. The museum at Diekirch showed me a former enemy up close. What I saw were human beings no different from myself—it's all God's world.

Joan Morrison received her Associates in Gerontology at age 63 and now assists in nursing homes with patient activities. She's been a member of the Church of Christ (a cappella) since she was 11 years old.

Book Review

Loosening Your Grip by Harold Shank, (Sweet Publishing, 1995) 200 pp.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM VERMILLION

Harold Shank is the preaching minister of the Highland Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee. This congregation of 1300 or so members is located adjacent to the University of Memphis campus and sponsors a Christian Center activity on that campus. In 1995, this church hosted the national Church of Christ campus ministries conference.

Highland Church of Christ is active in missions, and is particularly well known for its work in Kiev, Russia, to which dozens of congregational members have gone to teach and minister to spiritual, physical, and especially medical needs. But this congregation is probably best known for being one of the country's most active congregations, of any denomination, in ministering to inner city children, the homeless, and the urban poor. In 1992, they hosted the national urban ministries conference for Churches of Christ. Since Memphis is ranked among the poorest, if not the poorest, of U.S. cities with a metropolitan area of at least one million population, this congregation is one of the bright lights of Christianity, not only among the Churches of Christ, but also among the churches of Christ.

Shank, as might be expected from his position in that congregation, is among the country's leading advocates for a Christianity of service or wearing of the towel, although he repeatedly emphasizes that knowing Christ is the biggest need of all. At the 1995 Jubilee in Nashville, attended by more than 10,000 people, he spoke four times on the general theme of service to others. His brilliant and moving keynote address focused on how people who have

listened to the heartbeat of God will be involved in those ministries of service which touch God's heart. In the last decade, he has moved from relative obscurity to become one of the most respected and influential speakers and writers among those who are seriously committed to letting Christ be the Lord of their lives as they seek to serve God and humanity.

As a result, when I was attending a conference last summer and was told that I could buy a Shank book for \$10 and \$4 of that would go to Russian missions, it was easy for me to be persuaded. Like most people, I want to read many more books than I have time to read. I have purchased dozens, if not hundreds, of books which I haven't gotten around to reading yet; but I was determined to read Shank's book. When one of *Integrity's* editors saw me reading it during some free time at an encampment we both attended and invited me to review it, I even read it a second time, this time more slowly and carefully.

This book, *Loosening Your Grip*, published in 1995 by Sweet Publishing, is about 200 pages in paperback and is printed in an easily read type. There are 12 chapters plus an introduction and epilogue. Each of the chapters begins with a lengthy quotation from scripture to set the scene and concludes with a series of questions under the caption, "Focusing Your Faith." For example, the first chapter is entitled "The Whopper" and begins with the quoting of Luke 18:18-30, the account of a rich and young ruler who came to Jesus and was told to give away everything and follow Jesus. The chapter then discusses the big lie that Satan puts in our hearts. This lie is that our

successes and ministries depend on our own abilities and efforts. It concludes with several questions about how we feel about giving up control and letting God rule our lives.

The theme of the book is clear from its title and the above comments about the first chapter. To Shank, letting go of control and turning it over to God is what leads to true success and security. It is a book which emphasizes that discipleship is a total commitment of service and surrender. While this takes great trust and courage, so much so that very, very few among us have really done it, the rewards are great.

The various chapters discuss various aspects of control. They address (not in this order) prayers, relationships with others, inner peace, ambitions and goals, ministering to the needy, financial security, dealing with discouragement and fatigue, mental health, facing death, and dealing with temptation.

Since few books are like the Bible in that one can unhesitatingly recommend it to everyone, the difficult part of any review is determining who should or should not read the book. This is not a "deep" book in the sense that it is hard to grasp or follow the author's points. (Actually, some so-called "deep" books are just poorly written, which makes them obscure rather than "deep.") It only takes a few pages of reading to know the basic message of this book. Nor is it a book that is likely to surprise the dedicated Christian with its message, since most of us have given lip service to the basic concepts

long ago. However, it is "deep" in the sense that it deals with a truth which, while most of us think we understand it, few have actually done it. The book needs to be read by most of us.

Those of us who want to do just enough to "get by" or to give God the "leftovers" of our time, money, energy, etc., need to read it in order to have our consciences pricked. Those of us who have been seeking to love God above all else need to read it in order to be reminded of the implications of that decision in our daily lives. Those of us who are relatively new to the disciple's walk but who seek to make that walk closer to God need to read it in order to gain some insights into how to achieve that end. Obviously, some of us will brush it aside with "everyone knows that" and blithely continue to live the self-focused lives of lukewarm service, which are typical of many in a society where Christianity is popular, and to which it is easy to give lip service. While some of us may conclude that we already have been striving to do what Shank suggests, only the arrogant among us would believe that we already have achieved a state in which we have surrendered everything to the control of God. In short, the book is valuable, not because it contains much that is "new," but because it powerfully and persuasively reminds us of how inadequately we have picked up the mantle of discipleship. It is a book which strengthens resolve and encourages trust in God, and who doesn't need that?

William Vermillion is occupied as a university professor at Middle Tennessee State University whose specialty is industrial organizational psychology. He also serves as faculty advisor for the Christian Center on campus, and as chairman of the educational committee for North Blvd. Church of Christ in Murfreesboro.

Readers' Response

To the Editors and Readers of *Integrity*:

The July/August 1995 edition of *Integrity* contained an article, "Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?" written by John Loftus. The byline identified Mr. Loftus as a teacher in the Leadership Institute for Great Lakes Christian College in Lansing, Michigan. This byline created significant reactions from primary readers and readers who had copies of the article. As is often the case, many people attribute the opinions of one individual associated with an organization to the entire organization and to all individuals in that organization. Therefore, it is important that we clarify the relationship of Great Lakes Christian College to the views of Mr. Loftus.

First, it should be stated that John Loftus and I have a very close personal relationship. While serving in my twenty-four year ministry with Christ's Church at Georgetown, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, I baptized John Loftus into Christ. I also baptized his mother, his father, his two brothers, and his sister-in-law. John served an internship with us at Ft. Wayne during his years as an undergraduate student at Great Lakes Christian College. I presided and preached at John's ordination and conducted the wedding ceremony for him and his wife, Kathy. We are very good friends and, even though we have different opinions regarding some significant matters, I consider him a brother in Christ.

My role at Great Lakes Christian College requires that I fulfill a responsibility to the College in spite of personal relationships. In this situation that responsibility requires me to clearly state that the opinion of John Loftus regarding the relationship of baptism to salvation does not represent the

views of Great Lakes Christian College. When Mr. Loftus taught at Great Lakes, he did so as an adjunct professor. Those who have expressed concern about his opinions being taught in the classroom at GLCC should know that, to the best of our knowledge, the subject matter of his class did not address this issue.

We recognize and acknowledge John's right to study the Word and come to his own conclusions. At the same time, I would encourage all readers to remember that the conclusions of an individual associated with any organization do not necessarily represent those of other individuals affiliated with that same organization nor of the organization itself.

I wish to thank *Integrity* for allowing me to clarify the position of Great Lakes Christian College in this matter.

Jerry M. Paul, President
Great Lakes Christian College
Lansing, Michigan

Editor's Response (edited):

Dear Mr. Paul:

We have received your letter regarding the reaction Great Lakes Christian College has received to John Loftus' article "Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?" which appeared in the July/August issue of *Integrity*. We are saddened by the response both you and John Loftus have received to this article. We want you to know that we do not publish any article in *Integrity*, except after much prayer and thought. However, this does not mean that we as editors, or the Board of *Integrity* as a whole, or as indi-

viduals, agree with every article we publish. This article even received more prayer and thought than most. When John first sent us the article he asked that we let some of our Board members read it before we published it. We did have several members of our Board read the article, including Christian Church people with close connections to GLCC, and no one who read the article thought it would be a problem for John or GLCC. After the Board members read the article, we as the editors of *Integrity* and John as the author of the article decided to publish it.

We will be glad to publish the letter you sent us. The earliest we could publish it would be in the January/February 1996 issue. The November/December issue of *Integrity* (which has already gone to the printer's) will contain an article in response to John's article by Don Stowell of the Swartz Creek Christian Church. Throughout the years *Integrity* has tried to publish articles that cause us to study and think. We have often printed articles that took different views of an issue. We have tried to emphasize what we believe to be a guiding principle of the Stone-Campbell movement: that we can differ and still accept one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord—"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity."

Unfortunately, since the beginning of our movement, the things that have made up the "essentials" category have grown to where unity beyond a very small group is impossible. The group I grew up in would not accept those who sang with an instrument. I realize that the issue of baptism is more fundamental than singing with or without an instrument. However, disagreement on both of these issues has been divisive in Christendom, in general, and among those who share the Stone-Campbell movement heritage. I believe that even an issue

as important as baptism does not have to divide Christians. If a person has conscientiously studied baptism and comes to a different interpretation than I have, but this person accepts Jesus as God's Son and as

We saw John's article as a challenge to study and think.

his or her Lord and Savior, and shows the fruits of the Spirit, then I believe I must accept him or her as my brother or sister, even though we may disagree about baptism. Otherwise, how we understand baptism, or how we are baptized, becomes a test of fellowship beyond Christ.

We saw John's article as a challenge to study and think. His article and life show evidences of serious study and conscientious love for the truth. He believes that we respond to Christ by faith that "compels us to repent, confess, and be immersed in baptism." His article asked questions designed to make all of us, especially those who grew up with a legalist view of baptism, think, study, and maybe be more accepting of fellow believers who do not have the same view of baptism that we do, or who may not have been baptized in the same way as we were. If we can be saved despite moral errors, we can be saved despite doctrinal errors.

Our hope is that when people read an article in *Integrity* with which they disagree, that it will cause them to study the Bible, either to gain new insights or to strengthen what they already believe.

Again, we are sorry for the problems this has caused you, GLCC, and John. We are even sorer for what this says about our movement to reform, restore, and unify the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

J. Bruce Kilmer
Co-Editor, *Integrity*

Dear Editors:

Thank you for your magazine. I was particularly interested in "Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?" in the current issue. (Is "interested" enough of a non-committal word for one who can't decide whether she agrees or disagrees?)

Sue Burton
Littleton, Colorado

It appears that to [John Loftus] experience is more acceptable authority than the clear teaching of the Bible. I see no reason why we should apologize for what the Word clearly teaches. I believe instead that we should clearly speak up, in whatever company we find ourselves, to defend eternal truth.

"I'm eager to recognize the true faith in Jesus which is shown by many unimmersed believers, but I can't put aside what the Lord clearly teaches . . ."

[John] seems to choose instead to seek excuses for defending persons who want to be Christian and insist that they are Christian when they are either ignorant of scriptural truth, or are defiant and deficient in putting into practice what God's Word clearly teaches. You ask me and others to join in your acceptance of false doctrine. I'm eager to recognize the true faith in Jesus which is shown by many unimmersed believers, but I can't put aside what the Lord clearly teaches just so they can imagine that they are saved when they are headed for Hell. I think we ought to tell the truth rather than what itching ears want to hear.

Ray Downen
Joplin, Missouri

Thank you and the staff of *Integrity* for another indescribable year of joy! Thank you for your personal integrity, for allowing all readers of all persuasions their "printed" voices, choices and understanding without feeling threatened.

A special "thank you" for "Journal Entries: Temptation, Spirit, and Grace," *Integrity* July/August 1995. What a strength to all us humans!

Kathy Wyler
Kerrville, TX

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let's not get lost in a forest of hermeneutics or sink our souls in a sea of semantics. We are bought by Christ's blood, and only God and we know who we are because his Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are his by creation and redemption.

We are here to do what Christ did while he was in the world, and what he would do if he were here now:

- spread the good news of the gospel;
- feed the hungry;
- clothe the naked;
- shelter the homeless;
- meet the needs of the helpless;
- show our love of God by keeping his commandments and by keeping pure ourselves;
- love and encourage one another, especially the household of faith,
- give and forgive,
- to walk humbly every day in joyful anticipation of the hour when he will return to claim us as his own and take us home to be with him forever.

Let's remember who we are and get on with it.

Aline Edson
Kerrville, TX

Editor's Note: This was the first North American Christian Convention that long-time Integrity reader Lora Price had attended, and she was happy to share her impressions with us. . .

On July 16, 1995, Indianapolis, Indiana was invaded by an army. This army was composed of Christians from the Christian Church and Churches of Christ there to attend the North American Christian Convention. Reports tell us that over 40,000 were there.

This army was led by hundreds of volunteers. There were volunteers taking care of little children, taking school-age children on excursions to fun places, and registering people. A special force of teenagers were planning future invasions or participating in Bible Bowl competitions, preaching competitions, and special teen classes.

This was one of the happiest invasions anyone has ever seen. The NACC is a wonderful, spiritually uplifting break from everyday life and I encourage you to try to go whenever possible.

Besides the adults meeting in the RCA Dome for worship, teenagers and school-age children each had their own separate worship times. Classes were available for all ages during the day. Because the Mission Convention was also part of the NACC this year, half of the classes were devoted to mission topics. The rest of the classes were topical in nature.

The largest exhibit hall, filled with booths and displays for everything from mission activities to ministry groups to book stores and music groups, was a favorite meeting place to find old friends.

This was one of the happiest invasions anyone has ever seen. The NACC is a wonderful, spiritually uplifting break from everyday life and I encourage you to try to go whenever possible.

Lora Price
Berkley, MI

Editor's Note: The following news is from good friend and Integrity reader Jim Batten, with whom we Kilmers taught English in the early 1970's at Ibaraki Christian College, where Jim still faithfully serves . . .

Missionaries in Japan hosted the 34th Asian Missions Forum, held September 10-15, 1995, at Tama Retreat Center, a U. S. Military facility just outside Tokyo. A total of 50 people from 10 countries participated in the forum. Countries represented were Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Thailand, and the U. S. A.

Featured speakers were Howard Horton, long-time missionary and teacher, and Paul Faulkner, known for his work in Marriage Enrichment Seminars and family counseling.

The Asian Missions Forum is held in a different Asian country each year. Next year's forum will be in Thailand.

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