



ALL ABOUT INTEGRITY

*Integrity is a quarterly journal dedicated to stimulating personal and public thought, prayer, and discussion about living the Christian life. Its roots are in Restoration Movement Christianity, encompassing Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ, but Integrity strives for unity among **all** Christians. Published by a nonprofit corporation, Integrity 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 of the Board as a whole.*

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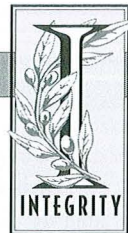
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We have over 25 years' worth of back issues on a wealth of topics. You can also access our web site, which has issues dating back to 1992.



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Squeezing Out Truth

Curtis D. McClane

Three years before *Integrity* journal was born, Robert Meyers made a plea for “creating an atmosphere in which independent minds may feel at home” (Voices of Concern, p. 2. (St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1966)). It was his dream that this book would blaze a new trail and provide an outlet for the brilliant minds and passionate souls who were part of a swelling exodus from the Restoration churches. It is out of this same spirit and historical setting that *Integrity* was conceived and born. This love affair between independent thinking and Christian freedom produced a spiritual brainchild that has now turned thirty years of age.

In the spirit of celebrating the maturation of this ministry we are offering in this issue a sampler of articles over the past thirty years. And I can think of no more appropriate article to commence this issue than with *Integrity's* very first Editorial by Hoy Ledbetter.

For those of you who have been faithful readers of *Integrity* over the years, I invite you to carefully read this editorial and ask if we have been true to this original vision.

The other articles chosen for this sampler are indicative of the depth and breadth of past issues. After much agonizing, input, and decision, coupled with intensive prayer, we are sending out this issue with its specific articles carefully selected for you. In my own preparation for this editorial I read some back issues, and I never cease to be amazed at how timely and relevant the issues still are.

At the cider mill

This past week Nancy and I went to nearby Yates cider mill and experienced Michigan autumn at its best. The fresh squeezed apple cider, the cinnamon donuts, the trees aflame with colors: it was a quintessential fall sensory experience. As we were purchasing our cider and donuts we were able to watch the process of apples being ground up and then the pulp being pressed under 5 tons of weight in order to squeeze out the juice. Then the juice was funneled into a large vat for the process of pasteurization.

This cider mill has been in operation over one hundred years and it is operated by a water mill. It was fascinating to watch the large

wheel turn, the drums and wheels work in unison to apply the right pressure in squeezing out the apple cider.

My mind went in a million different directions as I was thinking about the metaphorical application to *Integrity's* ministry over the past thirty years.

But the one idea that God kept putting in my mind was the squeezing out of the juice. I see the role of *Integrity* like that press. It is a place where all together join in heart, soul and mind to apply the most passionate pressure of inquiry in order to squeeze out the truth of God's revelation for today. Even though the same mill is used, the apples are renewed yearly. Even though the squeezing process is the same, new cider is savored every fall. Even though the place is crowded, new faces continue to arrive every autumn to see what all of the hubbub is about.

Theological/spiritual hub-bub. What an interesting concept! *Integrity* has been creating that now for over thirty years. And people want to see what all of the commotion is about. It is about the exciting experience of personally savoring the taste of the fresh cider of the liberating gospel!

New cider every fall. What an important concept! *Integrity* would close its doors (as would the cider mill) if we offered the same thing issue after issue. But we encourage fresh thinking, new cider in new cups.

The same cider mill is used. What a necessary concept! *Integrity* continually goes back to the source of God's revelation and spiritual authority: the Holy Scriptures. We

believe in the authority of Scripture over our lives and we are constantly returning to the source of living water. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit continue to reveal themselves to us at this place so we can taste of their divine drink.

I SEE THE ROLE OF *INTEGRITY* LIKE THAT PRESS. IT IS A PLACE WHERE ALL TOGETHER JOIN IN HEART, SOUL AND MIND TO APPLY THE MOST PASSIONATE PRESSURE OF INQUIRY IN ORDER TO SQUEEZE OUT THE TRUTH OF GOD'S REVELATION FOR TODAY.

In the state of Michigan there are one hundred and fifty cider mills. Each one attracts approximately 50,000 visitors each fall. Can you imagine the ludicrous situation if each cider mill claimed it was the only true cider mill?! In fact, each mill has its own family history, its own processing, marketing, and selling approaches. But it is the grander picture of the apple scene in the state of Michigan that makes so many trips exciting, bringing new experiences and meeting new people at each place.

Integrity has tried to recognize the existence of the multiplicity of spiritual cider mills over the entire landscape of Christendom. Again, each church, each religious movement has its own family history, emphasis, and concerns. But it is Jesus' prayer for unity that has driven this ministry and kept it impetus alive. We continue to believe that this is a viable ministry that glorifies the kingdom of God. In 1809 in his Declaration and Address Thomas Campbell said that “Jesus' dying commands, his last and ardent prayers for the visible unity of his professing people, will not allow us to be indifferent to this matter” (*Declaration*

and Address, p. 39. (St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1978 reprint)).

It has been *Integrity's* desire to honor this prayer of our Lord. We provide an opportunity for Christians of all traditions to express their views as they seek for a greater understanding, a more ecumenical fellowship, and a richer experience of faith among fellow believers. Keep this ministry in your prayers. Continue to

support us with your free will donations. Continue to send us your articles. And continue to read, think, share, live, and exemplify the squeezed-out truth of Jesus in your daily walk.



Curtis D. McClane, Editor-in-Chief



JUNE 1969

Integrity's very first editorial

Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor, Integrity

This is the first issue of *Integrity*, a monthly periodical which is dedicated to promoting unity, soundness, and honesty in the body of Christ. *Integrity* is published by a corporation of Michigan residents who are members of the Church of Christ. The corporation members, although varying widely in background, age, and religious experience, are united in love for the brotherhood and in their desire to contribute to its growth unto perfection. They believe they know the church and the issues which confront it today. They have selected the following editorial board: Hoy Ledbetter as editor-in-chief, David Elkins, Frank Rester, and Dean Thoroman.

"Integrity" is a word which comes from a Latin root meaning "untouched,

intact, entire." It denotes the condition of completeness and soundness, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity. Its relevance to the Christian experience hardly needs documentary support. The RSV uses the word in 24 passages, including Paul's important instructions to his associate: "In your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech." The Biblical usage of the word points to simplicity of intention, the equivalent of being honest, sincere, and genuine, which is fundamental to true character.

In keeping with the connotation of its name, *Integrity* will seek to encourage believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and deed, among themselves and toward all

men. It may legitimately be inferred that the issuance of a publication with such a purpose implies that there is division, impurity, and dishonesty to be overcome.

Those who are abreast of current religious conditions are aware of the immediate danger of further division. Churches of Christ are already divided into at least two dozen different factions, many of which for several years now have had no fellowship with each other. Those who have aspired to remove this thorn now see their hopes grow dimmer because of local intensified conflicts. New factions are on the verge of springing up, and already have in some cases, both to add to the division and to debilitate further our historic plea for the unity of all believers. We believe that a solution to this growing problem should be sought with renewed diligence, and we dedicate ourselves to that important search.

Integrity proposes to deal fairly and thoroughly with current issues. In the belief that truth has nothing to fear, we will attempt to cover the various sides of controversial questions, not for the sake of controversy, but in order that the reader may have opportunity to hear and evaluate for himself the bases of particular beliefs. And we believe the ordinary man has sufficient intelligence to decide for himself what is right and what is wrong, provided he is given proper information, and that it is highly insulting for one of his peers to attempt to lord it over his faith.

Churches of Christ have a rich heritage in the reformation

movements of the 16th and 19th centuries. When Martin Luther debated with his brethren in the Catholic Church, he set forth two principles which have become basal in all Protestantism. These are:

1. The supreme authority of the Bible.
2. The right of individual interpretation.

Luther contended that popes, councils, and human decrees could not be cited as the source of religious authority and that the Bible alone is our rule of faith and practice. But who, his opponents countered, is qualified to interpret the Bible? They argued that the common man could not understand the Scriptures without

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the interpretation of the church. Luther answered this argument by asserting the right of every man to interpret the Bible for himself. The importance of these two principles in the history of the reformation and restoration could hardly be exaggerated. It was strong belief in these that caused men like Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone to begin what later evolved into the "Church of Christ."

But there has always been a tendency to get away from the basic principles. They have been accepted in theory, but denied in practice. And they are at stake in some of our keenest controversies today.

It is now being vigorously argued, either directly or indirectly, within some churches of Christ that the common man does not have the right of private judgment. A few church officials will not allow the members of their

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congregations to hold views contrary to their own, although that has not yet become a general position. Some hold that their interpretation must be the interpretation of all, or else those who disagree will be expelled from the fellowship.

But the more tolerant officials of this sort will not refuse to allow one to believe what he believes—just as long as he does not express that belief! Thus they effectively squelch the right of private judgment while giving it lip service.

We believe that the basal principles of the restoration—the very principles that have made us what we are—are worth defending. We believe further that the

... AND WHEN CHRISTIANS ARE SO AFRAID OF THEIR OWN POSITIONS THAT THEY CANNOT BEAR TO HEAR ALTERNATIVE ARGUMENTS, IT IS TIME TO ASK WHAT WE ARE AFRAID OF.

taproot of division is departure from them. Yet, at the same time, we are aware of the danger of entertaining corrupting influences and growing doctrinal unconcern.

We also believe that one of the greatest needs of our generation is that of

genuine honesty. When the time comes wherein the point of view we express is determined by the company we are in, it is time for us to ask what became of our integrity. When we cannot question our own beliefs without threatening the peace of the church, we may well lament the departure of such Christian virtues as forbearance and self-surrender. When one cannot speak his mind without destroying his influence, he could profitably (even if painfully) investigate the real basis of that influence. And when Christians are so afraid of their own positions that they cannot bear to hear alternative arguments, it is time to ask what we are afraid of.

Integrity deplores the party spirit, and we pledge ourselves never to promote a faction. We will never encourage any person to leave one faction in order to join another. To us there is nothing more unsavory than a sect devoted to opposition of sectarianism.

We anticipate that some will dismiss us as an underground movement bent on undermining the fundamentals of the faith, but we have no such devious intentions. More than anything else we wish to conserve the fundamentals of the faith, and our only objective with regard to the church is that it might be the true complement of Christ in the world today.

At the present time all readers are receiving *Integrity* free, their subscriptions being paid out of a fund contributed by our generous friends, but we are not sure how long we will be able to operate on this basis. If

anyone thinks what we are saying is worthy of circulation and therefore wishes to contribute, he is invited to do so. Checks should be made to "Integrity" and sent to the address given below.

We invite readers to send us names and addresses to be placed on our mailing list. However, we do not wish to be unwelcome guests in any home. If any reader wishes to be

dropped from our list, we invite him to write and so inform us, and we will promptly respond.

We also invite comments, whether critical or commendatory. We will be encouraged by the latter, and disciplined by the former. We also welcome material for publication (nothing anonymous, please; remember our name!). ❁



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1978

Playing It Safe

W. Carl Ketcherside

The unity of all believers in Christ has been hindered and postponed by many things. It is time for all people of goodwill to examine their thinking. Regardless of the party into which they have been maneuvered by circumstances, they will never be able to contribute to the oneness of the saints until they rid themselves of some common fallacies which act as impediments to the answer of the prayer of our precious Lord.

One such fallacy is the "playing it safe" syndrome. Many keep aloof from others on this basis. Where scripture has not spoken and the mind of God has not been revealed, the argument is frequently made, "Would it not be safer to do thus and so?" Out of this is born the cults of

conformity and the parties of perpetuation. Would it not be safer not to have Sunday schools? Would it not be safer to use one container in the Lord's Supper? Or unleavened bread? Or fermented wine? Would it not be safer to segregate ourselves from others who differ with us about the millennium? The things adopted today merely because they are safer become the dogmas of tomorrow. Sanctified by usage and familiarity, they are transferred into the pattern.

The whole attitude assumes that God thinks more of legalistic consistency and correctness of opinion than he does of unity within his family. Yet he has not spoken about these other matters but has repeatedly condemned schism. What we need is not people who "play it safe" but those who make themselves vulnerable. Jesus did this when he left heaven. If he

had subscribed to our thinking he would never have come to earth.

We tend to confuse sameness with saneness. But the sane thinking recall that Jesus not only took the most dangerous step possible, but commanded us to live dangerously. He plainly told us to take up our cross daily and follow him. He said the only way to find life is by losing it, and losing life is the opposite of playing it safe. We are on the cutting-edge rather than on the dulled and blunted side of life. To promote unity among all

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believers is not a task for a cowardly and fainthearted person who weighs the results against his or her own safety and chooses the latter.

We need to get out of our feathered nests and go where the people are. We have quaintly imagined they would all

Although W. Carl Ketcherside left to be with the Father on May 24, 1989, his writings continue to exhort and encourage! In his younger years Carl was a "wing commander," as he put it, of one of the most legalistic sects among Churches of Christ. Halfway through his life he changed course and became, in his words, "a peacemaker and no longer a piecemaker."

THE CHURCH IS NOT A GALLERY FOR THE EXHIBITION OF EMINENT CHRISTIANS, BUT A SCHOOL FOR THE EDUCATION OF IMPERFECT ONES.

-HENRY WARD BEECHER

come to us, beating a path to our door to associate with us. Not only have they not done so, but our losses are almost as much as our gains in some places. If a congregation really wants to affect the world for good, let it have the courage to go by twos and fours to attend other places—Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Reformed, or whatever. Let them go, not to debate, but to see and understand how people propose to worship God, and why.

Let them form friendships and encourage mutual study across lines, preferably in homes.

Are we afraid we will lose some of our members? Perhaps we deserve to lose them! If we must keep people locked up to keep them with us, we do not really have them at all. It is only free people who can freely associate without fear. We can never grow together while standing aloof from one another. It is only by exchange of thoughts and ideas that mutual respect for one another can ever be achieved. Playing it safe, as a philosophy of life, would never have allowed Jesus to leave heaven and will never allow us to enter it! ❀



JULY/AUGUST 1996

Light Can Shine Through Brokenness

Karen Pearson

In her book entitled *God Uses Cracked Pots*, Patsy Clairmont speaks about our brokenness here on earth:

Picture an empty pot with a network of cracks down the front. Now imagine that pot filled with light and a lid put on top. Where does the light shine through? The cracks. That is the same way the Lord's light shines through our lives. Not so much by what we do naturally, but by what he must do in us supernaturally for it to be so . . . My prayer for myself is that his light shines through my cracks!"

I agree with Patsy. I hope God's light will shine through the cracks in my life. I was born with a very obvious crack in my "pot."

I was the second of five children. My mother had no significant difficulties with the pregnancy, but when I was born, there was a lump on the calf of my right leg. My mom pointed it out to the doctor, who said, "It's probably just birth trauma; don't worry about it unless it grows." By the time I had been home from the hospital a few weeks, the lump had grown to the size of an egg. A biopsy found the lump to be malignant cancerous sarcoma.

The doctors told my parents they must amputate my leg to save my life. My dad remembers being told I had a 20% chance of survival. On Halloween Day, October 31, 1961, at just seven weeks old, my right leg was amputated above the knee. My mom says I cried for what seemed like a week. She also remembers that I responded to one particular nurse who would hold me and sing to me. I am thankful that my childhood memory doesn't go back far enough to remember that traumatic time in my life.

My parents brought me home and we tried to continue on with our lives. The doctors told them the first three years were critical—if they had not gotten all the cancer, it could show up somewhere else. But I grew, and smiled, and crawled and soon they had to fit me for a prosthesis because I wanted to walk. After three years there were no signs of cancer.

Living With Disability

Now came the hard part: learning to live with a physical disability. As the years went by, the life and death concern was replaced with learning how to cope with being "different." I remember the first day of kindergarten. Somehow in my five-year-old mind, I had it figured out, even though my sister and brothers all had two legs—I convinced myself that everyone my age (born in 1961) had only one leg. I

was looking forward to meeting others who were like me. Imagine my surprise (and disappointment) when I got to school and realized I was the only one! My growing up years were filled with ups and downs. I wrestled with “Why?” and then “Why me?”

High school was especially frustrating since I was an average teenage girl who wanted to date. Boys were too scared of or misinformed about me. I went through

TODAY I WOULD CHALLENGE DR. KUBLER-ROSS TO ADD ONE MORE STAGE TO HER LIST AND THAT WOULD BE “SURRENDER TO JESUS CHRIST.”

times of wishing I hadn’t survived the surgery, of wishing I could be like everyone else. I told God about all the great things I could have done if I only had two legs!

When it was time to go to college, I decided to go into a helping profession, since that was something I could do. I majored in occupational therapy at Western Michigan University. One of the courses recommended to me was a “Death & Dying” class, because some time or other I might have to deal with a dying patient. I had no idea that this class would help my own personal growth.

Dealing With Loss

We studied the five stages of grief/loss theorized by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who worked extensively with terminally ill patients. She explained that there are stages a person goes through when faced with the knowledge that death will be soon. My instructor said these stages could be applied generally to almost any loss in life. The stages are:

1. Denial. A buffer from reality.
2. Anger. Feelings of rage, envy, or resentment.
3. Bargaining. Trying to enter into an agreement with God to postpone the inevitable.
4. Depression. Stress caused by the added difficulties and realization of the inevitable.
5. Acceptance. Coming to terms with reality and no more struggle.

A light bulb went off in my head! I had been experiencing these stages in my life as an amputee! I was grieving over the loss of my leg. Just knowing this and being able to express it to others really helped me into the acceptance stage. But during those years I would easily fall back into one of the other four stages when something—some event or problem—suddenly came up. How I wanted to stay in the acceptance stage!

Living In The Sixth Stage

Today I would challenge Dr. Kubler-Ross to add one more stage to her list and that would be “Surrender to Jesus Christ.” It wasn’t until after I became a Christian in 1988—when I made a commitment to Jesus and made him Lord of my life—that I found I was staying in the acceptance stage for a long time. When I committed my life, I also committed everything I am—including my broken, cracked “pot”—to Jesus. He helped me to see, as I grew in knowledge of him, that he loves me just this way! I didn’t have to have two legs or be a beauty queen or an “A” student or a highly-paid professional

for him to love me.

I continue to be in the “surrender” stage. There are still times of frustration—both physically and emotionally. Life is not a bed of roses. For example: Seeing myself on video tape for the first time was difficult. I watched myself on video limping down the aisle at my wedding, and I thought: “I look so handicapped! Is that what people see first? If the inside of me could only show on the outside!” In my head I walk with the most beautiful, proper gait. But the Lord quietly teaches me humility and not to judge others by their outward appearances.

Another example of frustration has been in trying to care for a newborn infant using crutches for the first few weeks. Since my prosthesis fits so high on my leg, it was necessary for me to wait to wear it until my body was healed up. It was so frustrating not being able to carry my baby from place to place. I learned to ask for help. The Lord showed me that it’s okay to let others serve us and that we are all interdependent. My mom and mother-in-law were a terrific help.

Recently doctors have told me that the odds of having cancer at such a young age and surviving it are extremely small. Isn’t God’s plan for me truly miraculous? He doesn’t care about odds or percentages! I no longer struggle inside about why this has happened to me. After surrendering it to the Lord, I now have inner peace and no bitterness.

What crack is there in your life? It may be physical or emotional or spiritual.

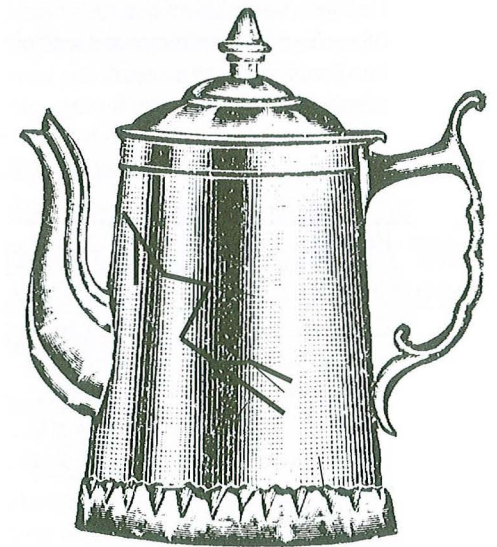
Karen Pearson continues to work part-time as an occupational therapist. She lives in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, with her husband Steve and two daughters, Heidi and Sarah.

It may be a back injury or a divorce or a strong-willed child. It may be an addiction or a seemingly irreconcilable disagreement with your spouse. Wherever you experience loss or the lack of strength

I DIDN'T HAVE TO HAVE TWO LEGS OR BE A BEAUTY QUEEN OR AN "A" STUDENT OR A HIGHLY-PAID PROFESSIONAL FOR HIM TO LOVE ME.

to cope with a problem, there is a crack.

The Lord wants us to surrender these cracks to him so that he can shine brightly through them. I’ve learned that if we surrender these things to him, day by day, we will be able to look back and see how he has shone through them. I encourage you to “stay in the surrender stage” and allow God to shine through the cracks in your life. ❀





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 (Romans 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

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?"

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

A WAITING FATHER IS ANXIOUS AND EAGER TO SHARE HIS FORGIVENESS AND FELLOWSHIP, REMOVE OUR GUILT, AND RESTORE US TO SPIRITUAL SOUNDNESS

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. 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).

No 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 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. 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 people shift their 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. ❁

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God Speaks to Us Today

Diane G. H. Kilmer

Have you ever wished God would give you specific instructions for an important decision you are facing? Have you ever wanted to just pick up the phone, tell God your problems, and then hear his answers? When you cannot find your exact dilemma addressed in the Bible, do you ever wish God could just drop a direct, personal response to you in your mailbox?

Alexander Campbell’s rational approach to these needs for direct contact with God has dominated the thinking of us Stone-Campbell heirs. Personal experience of God has been de-emphasized in reaction to emotional Pentecostalism. We’ve been taught that the gifts of the Spirit as described in I Corinthians 12 were for the first century only, the apostolic era, or until the Bible was assembled—when “the perfect comes”—as I Corinthians 13:10 is interpreted. We’ve been warned that to waver from the belief that today God speaks only through the Bible is to put ourselves in spiritual danger.

About 25 years ago I began a personal study of every scripture in the Bible on the Holy Spirit. Jesus’s excitement over the coming gift of the Holy Spirit recorded in John 14-16 stood out in particular:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. 16:7

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned. 14:15-18.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 14:26

These three chapters in John show that Jesus believed that all his followers (“forever”) would be better off spiritually with this special gift of the Helper and would be enabled to do more to glorify God than if Jesus himself remained on earth in human form (14:12 & 13). During my study I also noticed that Paul’s teachings regarding the Holy Spirit were not given with a limited era in mind. I discovered that many well-respected Christian commentators offered convincing reasoning that the phrase “when the perfect comes” in I Corinthians 13:10 refers to the event of Christ’s second coming, which definitely

fits the context. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that the Church of Christ teachings restricting the activities of the Holy Spirit today were people's interpretations and opinions, and I couldn't agree with them. I prayed to God and asked that if his Spirit was available inside me for guidance and instruction, that God would teach me how to listen to his voice.

God gladly honored my request, not leaving me "orphaned." The following information is gleaned from some of my experiences throughout the past 25 years

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when looking for guidance from God through direction from his Spirit, as Jesus promised around 2,000 years ago.

Helpful Basic Principles

First, I've found that approaching God for guidance within the framework of the following basic principles helps me to hear him more clearly:

1. We should not limit God. It's very important that we do not approach him with pre-conceived ideas of how he'll answer us or what he'll say. So that we don't confuse our wishes with God's guidance, we should approach him with an open mind.
2. We should believe the scriptural promises that God will give us wisdom and discernment. Just as God gave Solomon "a discerning heart and an

ability to distinguish right from wrong" (1. Kings 3:5 fl.), he will give the same to those who ask (Matthew 7:7-11, James 1:5).

3. We should honestly want to know God's will! The answer may require us to change our thinking or actions. Are we really willing to hear it?
4. We should be willing to say "Thy will be done." God should be approached with humility and with an intention to obey. It is more appropriate for us to ask him what his perspective is in a given situation, rather than request that we have our way. God will never guide us in a way that is contrary to Scripture. One day a woman told me that she had met a very attractive man in her therapy group, and had begged and begged God to let her know if she should divorce her husband and marry this man or not. She wondered aloud to me why God was not answering her prayer. The reason, of course, was because God had already expressed his opinion about fidelity and divorce in the Bible. She wasn't really interested in his perspective but wanted a new revelation.

God Guides in Many Ways

Five methods that God uses to communicate to us will be discussed in this article, but in no way is this an exhaustive list. No one can imagine all the methods the source of creative communication uses—a being who has been known to use burning bushes, talking mules, and incarnation to speak to his human creatures!

1. God communicates to us through the Bible.

II Timothy 3:16 teaches, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." Knowledge of what the Bible says about God and his ways is necessary in order to test what we think we're hearing from him. Also, the Spirit speaks through the Bible itself to give us answers to many of our questions. Many of us have experienced poring over Scripture, looking for answers of comfort or hope. Then a verse we've read a thousand times before suddenly jumps off the page at us, giving solid advice and counsel regarding our specific need.

My husband, Bruce, will never forget what happened one night when he was feeling particularly discouraged during his second year of law school. School was hard; it was all-consuming; it was exhausting. "Was it worth it?" he asked in prayer that night. "Am I wasting my time?" While perusing the scriptures, looking for any word of guidance or encouragement, he suddenly came upon these words and he knew that God was using them to speak directly to him:

If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here . . . Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts (Zec. 3:7; 4:6b).

Bruce believed these words and they gave him the courage to carry on, even though we wondered if the words were about earth or heaven, or both. Now, twenty years later, Bruce has served (and continues to serve) the church as an elder. Also, his current occupation as a regional court administrator places more than 80 courts and judges in Michigan under his charge. We believe God gives guidance through scripture.

2. Two-way prayer is another method God uses to guide us.

God responds to the individual's prayer request, as we already noted regarding Solomon. Part of Jesus' excitement in John 16 regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples was that it would begin a new era when all believers would have a portion of God's Spirit living in them, enabling a very direct line of communication and intimacy with God unavailable to "the masses" in the past. Paul describes this possibility in I Corinthians 2:10-16:

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.

How do we recognize God's voice? Jesus taught that we will know his voice and follow him (John 10:3-5). I still laugh about a specific prayer time 25 years ago when Bruce and I lived in Japan as missionary/teachers. I was alone in our bedroom, on my knees begging God again for the third time, with tears, for what I considered a perfectly legitimate request. Suddenly a voice said loudly, "No! Now get up and don't ask me again!" I jumped up and began quickly wiping tears away and readjusting my attitude before it occurred to me that the voice was God's and that he had spoken into my head . . . in English! That was my point of discovery that conversational prayer with God is available today. The New Testament is filled with examples of the Spirit giving direction.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE TAKES PRACTICE

During conversational prayer with God, I've learned to ask God a question, then quiet my mind to listen for an answer. Usually (although not always) a brief phrase or a few sentences come into my mind which answer the question. How can we know it's God's voice we're hearing? Couldn't we be having a conversation with ourselves? Or with

Satan? These are good questions, and I've learned to answer them this way: Always test what you hear by asking these questions:

- Is what I'm hearing consistent with Scripture? God's Spirit never leads us contrary to what he's already revealed in the Bible.
- Does what I hear lead me toward Jesus and spiritual freedom or toward sin or bondage?
- What do my most trusted Christian friends think about the answer?

After a particularly exasperating day coping with a bad-tempered, power-hungry manager who tended to create anxiety and anger in every office cubicle he entered, I sat down and asked God why the man behaved like this. The answer that came into my mind was: "His efforts to control everyone are based on fear—he doesn't know that I am here to trust." That answer rang true. No red flags came up when I "tested" it. And the information made me look at the spiritually needy manager in a whole new way.

Recognizing God's voice takes practice. Eventually you are able to discern what thoughts are your own and what ones are originating from another thinking being. Ideas that do not reflect the character of God as revealed in the Bible, that stir up rebelliousness, arrogance, or pride, are not from God, but from the Evil One. Satan and his forces can whisper into our minds. The Spirit helps us to discern who is speaking.

Sometimes God gives direction to groups of praying people, "for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" Matthew

18:20. Bruce and I have often received clear direction when we brought our decisions together to the Lord in prayer (such as new jobs, schooling, moving, etc.). I remember the first time we got down on our knees at the living room couch and asked God to make it clear to both of us whether Bruce should accept a new job offer. Then we got quiet and "listened." Soon my mind became busy, clearly sorting out the pros, cons, and our own pre-set priorities. Eventually we looked up at each other, asked each other if we'd heard anything, and discovered that both of us felt very peaceful about not taking the job. Time affirmed the decision when months later that company went out of business under negative circumstances. From this incident we learned that since God's Spirit is living in both of us, God can easily communicate the same answer to us.

After many years of practice receiving direction from God, a different kind of "answer" came up one year. Bruce was offered a new job opportunity that would move our family to another city. We did all the usual footwork to make the decision: gathered the facts about the job, city, schools, and church. Prayed and talked and prayed some more. But as the deadline approached, we just didn't receive any direction one way or the other, and our anxiety level was heightening. Finally, during a time of prayer with our minister, Bruce and I suddenly felt a sense of peace. When we talked together later, we discovered that we both felt that God didn't have a preference this time, that he was leaving it up to us, that we would

be "walking in his will" either way, so it was our choice.

THE BOOK OF ACTS IS FILLED WITH DISCIPLES PRAYING TOGETHER FOR DIRECTION.

In his book *Celebration of Discipline* Richard Foster describes this same "corporate prayer" for guidance working for hundreds of people at a time. I've personally experienced decision-making like this among smaller groups of 12 to 40 people who received the same unified guidance from God at one time (see brief description of an example in "Free to Celebrate," *Integrity*, Nov./Dec. 1985).

The book of Acts is filled with disciples praying together for direction. And in Acts 15 you see the group testing what they hear. They are sure the guidance is consistent with Scripture before they say with confidence: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." Acts 15:28.

Guidance heard in corporate prayer must be tested:

- Is the guidance we believe we are hearing from God consistent with Scripture?
- Does the guidance lead toward Jesus and spiritual freedom?
- Are these trusted Christian friends "of one mind" on the decision?

I suggest three additional "tests" to any decisions that a corporate prayer group makes:

- No one should end up with more "power" over another.
- Never should a "bruised reed be broken." Christ's humble, gentle attitude must prevail.
- Everyone's freedom of choice should still be intact—the same freedom that



the father gave his prodigal son in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:11-31).

3. God often uses Christian advisors or mentors to give us his direction.

As a young woman looking for any information I could find about living life sensitive to the Holy Spirit inside me, I discovered a book at my grandmother's house that introduced me to my first author/mentor: *The Helper* by Catherine Marshall. Since that time I've also received godly guidance from Christian teachers and friends, prayer partners, early church writers, and contemporary authors. Several proverbs, including these two, support the idea that others can be used by God to provide guidance: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22) and "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Paul encourages Titus (in Chapter 2:1-10) to establish mentor relationships

among young and old, men and women, slave and free. Richard Foster's chapter on "Corporate Guidance" in *Celebration of Discipline* offers excellent, comprehensive instructions regarding mentoring.

The same tests apply to advice given by a spiritual advisor that apply to group guidance (see #2 above).

4. Sometimes God uses circumstances to give us direction.

The book of Acts records many circumstances which gave Paul and others direction as to where and when to preach. The passage in Acts 16:6-10 is a good example of how Paul interpreted not being able to enter various ports or countries as the Holy Spirit guided them. One day, at age three, my youngest child did something particularly independent, which reminded me that parenting my children would not be a full-time job forever. So I prayed right there that God would clearly guide me into my next "era." No "instant" answer came. But during the next few months he reminded me of my (dormant) writing skills and began opening up opportunities for me to write, including articles for Integrity. Eventually he led me back to college, where I finished my degree under some of the best English and religion teachers around. After graduation, I asked God if there was a job where I could make money using my newly-polished writing skills yet still be home and available to my children when they came home from school. A few months later I was hired by a

marketing firm to work part-time for them at my home computer! Step-by-step God has been using circumstances to guide me into the next "era."

5. God uses dreams and visions to impart to us wisdom and direction.

If we believe that the Spirit is active and alive today, then we can also believe Joel's prophecy, as repeated by Luke:

"In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

"Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

"Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18).

Through reading and talking to others, I've discovered that this way of receiving guidance from God still occurs today, and my own experiences verify this fact. Dreams and visions are frequently recorded in the Old and New Testaments, but I'll focus on just one for now: Peter's experience in Acts 10. You'll remember that Peter is outdoors in the middle of the day when he sees the vision of the large sheet filled with "unclean" animals, birds and reptiles. A voice tells him to eat, Peter verbally resists, then these words are spoken: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." The vision, repeated three times by the Spirit, prepared Peter for the invitation to the house of

Cornelius, a Gentile, and clarified in Peter's mind that Jesus' salvation was also meant for the Gentiles.

A vision is defined by W. R. Inge, an English Christian intellectual and writer who lived from 1860 to 1954, in this way:

Vision begins when thought ceases, to our consciousness, to proceed from ourselves. It differs from dreaming, because the subject is awake. It differs from hallucination, because there is no organic disturbance: it is, or claims to be, a temporary enhancement, not a partial disintegration, of the mental faculties. Lastly, it differs from poetical inspiration because the imagination is passive. That perfectly sane people often experience such visions there is no manner of doubt.

This definition applies to Peter's experience, and to contemporary Christians to whom I have spoken. Dreams and visions must be tested like anything else we believe we are receiving from God: what they reveal must be consistent with what has already been revealed in scripture. In Peter's case, he could see that offering salvation to the Gentiles was consistent with Old Testament teaching: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right" Acts 10:34.

A vision or dream from God will teach the receiver God's perspective on something. Peter was given a visual understanding of God's inclusive gospel.

A dream or vision from God always generates spiritual freedom and a closer relationship to Jesus. Once Peter

understood how big the picture was, he also better understood the heart of Jesus.

In regard to dreams . . . I'm one of those people who dream in full color with lots of details and fully developed story lines. Sometimes these dreams are nightmares. A long time ago I turned over to God this ability to have vivid dreams,

I SHALL NEVER FORGET THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD ON THAT NIGHT OR HOW HIS MERCIES HAVE BEEN THERE EACH DAY SINCE.

praying that he be in control of them. Sometimes I still have dreams that have no meaning or simply reflect the day's spicy food. But once in a while I wake up from a dream that stirs me up in a way that makes me ask God, "Did you want to teach me something from that?" Then a kind of understanding may come to my mind, sometimes sentences with an explanation.

One time God used one of my dreams to help minister to someone else. My sister Judy called me from Tennessee one night, requesting prayer for her friend, Rachel, and Rachel's seriously ill 10-year-old son who had just entered the hospital. That night I dreamed that my daughter and I were in a similar situation. I woke up in the dark, weeping, and immediately discerned that God used my dream to help me pray for Rachel with real empathy. While praying for her and her sick child, a Scripture came to my mind (Lamentations 3:22-24) along with a strong sense of urgency to pass it on to Rachel. The next morning I told my sister of the unusual night, and she took the whole thing seriously, printed up the Scripture on her computer into banner form, and put it up in the boy's hospital

room. Recently, Rachel wrote me the rest of this story:

How I clung to the hope that if God cared enough to use you many miles away to care for us then surely he had not abandoned us. During the long days that followed, we spent time memorizing this verse. Little did we know what was ahead for us. On our sixteenth day in the hospital, the doctors began to prepare Michael for some tests for the following day. The agonizing pain that would follow this preparation is unequalled in his world to this day. For 6 to 7 hours, our son was absolutely violent with pain. He thrashed so and cried out so, I could barely manage him. There would be no help from the doctors for this pain—he would have to bear it. At some point in my crying out to the Lord, I asked the Lord to give us some way to make it through the night. Then very quietly, Michael began to whimper; "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope . . ." Lam. 3:22-24.

For the rest of the time, as long as I held Michael tightly and as long as he repeated the words of that verse or sang Silent Night, he could endure. I shall never forget the faithfulness of God on that night or how his mercies have been there each day since.

We were all amazed at how the Holy Spirit had guided my sister and

me to "prepare the room" ahead of time for God to encourage Rachel and her son throughout that ordeal.

What If God Doesn't Answer?

"Sometimes God doesn't speak," says Marion Bond West, a noted Christian writer and teacher. The bottom line is this: we are his creatures, and we must not be demanding but be willing to wait, humbly and patiently. Ronald Davis, a respected Christian teacher in Michigan who has written several articles for *Integrity* readers, wrote me a letter on the subject of guidance, and advised: "Be ready at any time or place to hear God. It won't necessarily be at special set-aside times for prayer but throughout the day or night."

You may have heard people speak of hearing from God "in God's time." But I think that when we have to wait for an answer, it is often because God is waiting for humans to change, move, listen, etc. God does not cross his own boundary of giving his human creatures "free will." Therefore, he often waits "in human time"—until all people and circumstances are ready—before he works his will.

After a prayer seminar I taught last year, a 90-year-old Christian woman who had attended the class sent me a letter describing her own interesting experience in regard to waiting for God's answer to her prayers:

When talking to my minister years ago, I said I could not remember ever having received an answer to prayer. He said,

"Go home, write down the prayers you are making now, put the list away and after a time look at it and see if you have had answers." So I did, and forgot about the list. Several years later my husband and I returned from a trip to Hawaii and I was so "up" after the trip that I was cleaning everything. I opened a desk drawer and found my list, and to my amazement every single prayer had been answered and when the answer was "no" I realized the "no" was the correct answer! At the bottom of the page I had written, "I hope that some day we can go to Hawaii," never dreaming we would! Isn't God wonderful?

Another reason we may not be hearing from God is because we didn't obey the last instructions he gave us, or there is an unacknowledged sin that must be dealt with. I learned this lesson the hard way after I ignored sending the perfect letter of condolence to a young woman to whom I had been witnessing. Week after week she, a receptionist at the chiropractor's office, and I had had discussions about faith in Christ when I came in for treatment for an injury. When I learned that there had been a death in her family, a letter to her came into my mind, line by line, that would have taught about the hope of resurrection which believers have in Christ. I believe the Spirit suggested that letter. But out of pure procrastination I ended up never sending it. During the next few weeks my prayers seemed to be going nowhere. The usual companionship I felt was missing. I finally asked, "What is wrong?" and then the unwritten letter came to my mind. I got the point and acknowledged my



disobedience and Christ forgave me immediately, of course, which cleared the lines of communication at once. But that particular opportunity had been lost forever. I've tried to obey promptings from the Holy Spirit ever since.

Room For Mistakes

One more important word regarding not hearing from God: sometimes we misunderstand him. Sometimes we just didn't hear him right or we missed the communication which can also come in the form of thoughts, Scriptures, songs, confirmation from others, or even burning bushes(!?). Remember this: God

THE GOD WHO LOVED US TO THE DEATH IS ONE WHO IS A PASSIONATE, LOVING, AND RECKLESS GOD. HE SEEKS US EVEN WHEN WE WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM.

can redeem our mistakes! He provides us a gracious space of time and opportunity in which to learn, to grow from toddlers to veterans. Communicating with God was as natural as breathing for Adam and Eve before the Fall. Lavishly gifting us with a portion of his own Spirit is God's way of restoring as much of that original, Garden of Eden communication as possible on a planet that is still in the process of redemption.

God does provide guidance to his children today. As Ronald Davis also wrote in his letter to me:

God speaks to his children as I speak to my own children. It is only natural that he does it. It would be unlike him not to talk to us. The God who loved us to the death is one who is a passionate, loving, and reckless God. He seeks us even when we want nothing to do with him.

Jesus explains this intimate arrangement like this:

Before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. They who have my commands and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and reveal myself to them(John 14:16-20).

God has arranged for the possibility of our receiving direct guidance from him through the work of his Holy Spirit. Practical advice for receiving guidance from God boils down to this:

- Ask God . . . with an honest desire to know his will.
- Listen carefully . . . be watchful.
- Don't isolate yourself; ask for advice from trusted Christian friends.
- Be prepared to wait for an answer!



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Ethnic Diversity in the Church of Christ: A Black American's Perspective

Ed Washington

I grew up worshiping at an all-black Church of Christ in Detroit, Michigan, during the 1970s. I went to school with other blacks, my neighborhood was black and until I joined the Army, I don't recall having much contact at all with anyone who wasn't black. I remember watching shows like the Brady Bunch and Andy Griffith and thinking, "Who really lives like that?" "Are there really neighborhoods that have big houses built on clean, white concrete with large, green lawns and attached garages?" "No way were there towns that had only two police officers to handle all the crime." Unless you grew up in the country, you lived in a city where the real surroundings were street lights, concrete, two-story brick houses, with garages in the back connected to a narrow driveway barely wide enough to park the car in-between houses, plus small lawns, and a few thousand police officers.

Preparation for Sunday morning worship began Saturday night. We had to take our baths, lay out our clothes, and prepare for the Lord's Day. I remember always being told that when you go to worship God, you were supposed to be your very best in everything that you did: in your

thoughts, your behavior during worship, and the way you dressed. You just didn't wear any old thing to church; that was considered disrespectful.

My Aunt was a Sunday School teacher and the church secretary, so she made sure we got there by nine o'clock. Worship service usually began about 11:00 a.m. One of the brothers would begin the service by welcoming everyone, making a few announcements, and then giving members the opportunity to ask for prayers, give testimonials, or rededicate their lives. He would then offer an opening prayer that would acknowledge the testimonials and specific prayer requests.

The song leader would begin the morning's song service with a few selections to get the service started. The song service seemed to be a part of the worship service where a transformation occurred for many of the members. You would hear the voices of some of the members rise in joy, and sometimes in sorrow. It seemed normal that when the song leader could hear and feel the emotion of a particular selection, he would continue the song. We would repeat the chorus, or sing the verses a few more times to allow those that were emotionally caught up to gather themselves. Very few song leaders could actually read music, and I would say the

majority of the members didn't read music either. We just learned the melody and did our best not to sing off key. When I think back, that's probably why we sang the same songs so often. But singing the same songs didn't seem to bother us at all. That sort of freedom to sing seemed to really make a difference in our mindset. After a few hymns—I say “a few” because you never really knew how many there would be—we had another prayer and then communion.

“THE LORD’S DAY, NOT THE LORD’S MORNING.”

The second prayer of the worship service seemed to be the longest. The brother leading would take time to describe the blessings that we were thankful for. Rather than saying “thank you, Lord, for our health,” he would “paint the picture” giving thanks, describing in detail, item by item, the things we were asking and for which we were thankful. Although as a kid I wished the prayers didn't take so long, I remember how the older and more spiritual members seemed to really get involved with this style of prayer. You would hear several “amens” and “thank Jesus.” It really seemed as though God were present.

During the communion we would either sing a song or have a brother read one of the apostles' accounts of the crucifixion. This also seemed to place members in a more spiritual frame of mind. After communion and the collection we would stand for one more song before the sermon. This was a welcomed opportunity to stand because we knew it would be a while before we stood again. We would always sing an up tempo selection, repeating a verse or two

and the chorus a few more times. Sometimes the song leader would initiate the song continuing and sometimes a few members in the audience might continue the selection. Even the minister would continue to lead the same song or start another as he made his way to the pulpit.

The sermons consisted of several quotes from scripture—men reading scriptures aloud from the front pews—humor, and analogies that I could relate to growing up in an inner city. The sermons were long and sometimes repetitive. The invitation alone sometimes lasted 15 to 20 minutes. We were constantly reminded that it wasn't the Lord's hour, but rather the Lord's Day. Therefore, it didn't matter what time we got out.

We were usually dismissed by 1:00 p.m. and, if there was nothing else going on, we would fellowship awhile and get home between one thirty and two o'clock. We would take off our good clothes before we did anything else, then have dinner, relax a little while, and get ready to go again that evening . . . “The Lord's Day, not the Lord's Morning.”

That describes how worship service in the Church of Christ was the majority of my life. It didn't matter which congregation we visited; if it was a “black congregation,” that was pretty much how it was done.

As I got older I began to hear about how the “white congregations” did things a little differently. I hadn't yet experienced it first hand, but I recall watching a few services that were televised.

When I finally did experience it first-hand, I couldn't believe how different the atmosphere was—everything from how quiet the service was (the audience not calling out any amen's or “thank Jesus”) to how casually the members dressed for worship. Even more unbelievable was that they would get the entire worship service in within an hour. Just when I would normally be settling in for the message at my home congregation, here I was standing listening to the closing prayer. I remember leaving the worship service feeling like I had not really worshiped God at all. After that experience, whenever I wanted to visit a Church of Christ, I wanted to make sure ahead of time that it was a “black congregation.” I wanted to worship in an atmosphere that I was familiar with and worship with people that I was comfortable being around.

Culture Shock

Finding a congregation like that had never been a problem until roughly three years ago, when my family and I relocated to a city where there were no “black congregations” within 50 miles.

As a result, we began to attend a predominantly white Church of Christ. I met with the minister on several occasions and doctrinally things were consistent with what I knew to be the truth. I enjoyed attending his Sunday morning and Wednesday evening Bible classes. The Sunday school classes for my three-year-old daughter were excellent and a few brethren, including the minister, seemed like they were very sincere men of God. A few sisters would call and check on

my wife shortly after she had our son, and offer to bring food.

Although I enjoyed several aspects of these new surroundings, the actual worship service at this particular Church of Christ was like completely changing religions; somewhat like going from a traditionally spirited Baptist style worship to a more solemn Catholic style service. I never imagined that I would ever experience such a tremendous contrast in style of worship.

It was quite a struggle waking up on Sunday morning. I didn't look forward to going to worship service. I wouldn't know any of the songs, and even if I did, they would be led differently, at an accelerated pace, and without the emotion that I was used to. It felt like we were singing through the song service just to get it over with, rather than worshipping God through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

The sermons are also very different. Our minister stands in the pulpit; gets right to the opening statement of his lesson, sticks with whatever is on paper and sits down. The presentation has very little emotion, and offers few if any analogies or humor. Although the messages were extremely beneficial to my overall spiritual development, I would leave the assembly that morning feeling somewhat cheated. I was so used to the minister illustrating points, telling stories that were funny, serious, or thought-provoking, using analogies and metaphors that the congregation could culturally relate to. Although these illustrations and examples took a little extra time, to me they were well worth it, in order for the lesson to have application in our lives. I missed that.

The communion and offering is taken

between the song service and the sermon. The announcements are made, the names of the visitors are read (without them standing) and we have a dismissal prayer. It's as if someone is holding this gigantic stop watch. The start button is pressed to begin worship, we worship, have a closing prayer, and there is this big click, the timer stops, and we go home. This is not a criticism of the service, but rather a personal observation of a style of worship that is much different from what I am used to. I never considered it wrong; just different. It was at this point that I really began to evaluate the issue of diversity in the church. Although the congregation was diverse in many aspects with members of different ethnic, educational, and geographic backgrounds, the worship service was very homogenized.

The “right way” to lead singing

After worshipping at this congregation for a while, I was asked to lead singing, and one Sunday evening I did. As expected, the reviews were mixed. A short time later I was asked by one of the elders if I would be willing to attend a song leader school that was being hosted by a predominantly white Christian school. Right away I felt that I was being asked to

IT'S AS IF SOMEONE IS HOLDING THIS GIGANTIC STOP WATCH. THE START BUTTON IS PRESSED TO BEGIN WORSHIP, WE WORSHIP, HAVE A CLOSING PRAYER, AND THERE IS THIS BIG CLICK, THE TIMER STOPS, AND WE GO HOME.

attend this school so that I could learn the “right” way to lead singing. I was a little offended. I remember thinking, “I’ve been leading singing in the Church of

Christ since I was 14 years old and all of a sudden someone thinks I should go to a song leader school.” Although I later learned that my perceptions were wrong, that was how I felt at the time. I let the elder know that I would consider going to the school, but that he should know up front that the way in which I lead songs would not change. I could definitely use the technical skills, but the emotion and overall style of leading a congregational song was part of my culture, and unless that conflicted with something scriptural, I felt no reason to change.

On the one hand I was angry, considering that as much as I had been uncomfortable with the established style of worship (especially the singing) over the past two years, I was still respectful, and refused to criticize how the worship was conducted. I respected their way of doing things. Then as soon as a song is sung a little differently or the song service lasts a little longer, certain members seemed to speak and act as though some crime had been committed during the worship service. They seemed to want diversity, but what we had was racial and ethnic representation. There was no diversity in the worship. There just seemed to be an overall lack of respect and/or tolerance for anything outside of what some members were comfortable with. Even though I was angry, I understood first hand how difficult an adjustment it must have been, especially after two years of having to make the adjustment myself.

I began to understand the distinction between being a part of a

racially diverse congregation, and a culturally diverse one. I struggled over whether I could continue to worship where I felt culturally out of place. I wanted to get more involved with the worship service by leading songs, saying “amen” or “praise the Lord” during the sermon. But I was really concerned about how other members would view that. As much as I tried over the last two years to adjust to that way of worship, I began to feel that I would never adjust.

I never thought that wearing a suit and tie could feel so awkward. After all, I have dressed the same way my whole life when attending worship service. I have always sung songs the same way as well. Yet when I sing a song a particular way it is viewed as not only different but wrong by some. Yet what is new or different for some is a way of life for others. Equating doing something different as being wrong, unscriptural or inappropriate, only perpetuates the underlying problem of cross-cultural intolerance.

After meeting with the elders to discuss how I felt, I learned for the first time that there were several members, black and white, that would appreciate a more spirited worship service. The elders welcomed a less methodical, robotic-style worship service and asked if I would agree to lead singing on Sunday mornings. I did, and again the reviews were mixed. Although many of the members complimented me on the singing, I learned later that others had a hard time accepting the song service. In fact, I recall one person stood up, walked up the center isle toward the pulpit, made a sort of

hand motion and walked out. That really hurt me. The only thing I could think to do was pray for that person; and I did, several times.

EQUATING DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT AS BEING WRONG, UNSCRIPTURAL OR INAPPROPRIATE, ONLY PERPETUATES THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM OF CROSS-CULTURAL INTOLERANCE.

I began to wonder if it was fair to those that were a part of an established tradition to start something different. I began to feel guilty about the way I led songs. I wondered how I would feel if an individual came from a background with traditions that were more charismatic and emotional than what I was. How accepting would I be? So I made up my mind that I probably would not lead singing again. Even though several members enjoyed it, it wasn’t worth offending the few.

After some prayer and a few lessons from the minister, I reevaluated my position. Being concerned about who I might offend by the way I lead a song or say a prayer or having my own personal preference of a particular style of worship began to take a back seat to what I really should be concerned about: What is offensive to God? What type of worship service does God not only prefer, but command?!

Opening the Door to Change

A great deal of spiritual maturity is going to have to occur if the church wants to successfully deal with the issue of diversity. Some assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors directed toward each other may need to be challenged by church leaders and church members. As

communities change and become more diverse, the church needs to decide if we are here to try and please or satisfy individual church members and their families or our Heavenly Father.

There is more being done in corporate America, governmental agencies, and private industry to cope with this issue of diversity than there is among members of the Churches of Christ. Not only do we ignore the issue, but in many instances it seems as though we promote separatism. I remember how the whites would move out of my old neighborhood as blacks moved in. They would stop worshiping at congregations where blacks began to attend. We believed in the same doctrine, studied from the same Bible and, most importantly, worshiped the same God. Yet it seemed that Christians from both races welcomed the separation.

Too many people are caught up in what is important to themselves, rather than what is good or best for others. Rarely do we really ever take the time to evaluate or honestly critique ourselves—our likes and dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, pet peeves, etc. We simply rely on how we were raised, and on our experiences in school and in the work place. A critical examination needs to be done by each individual Christian with God and his Word as the standard. People who are racially, gender, or culturally intolerant feel their flawed opinions, habits, and other character traits should be the standard for everyone to live by. Instead, Christ should be our example and to worship God our first priority.

Poor race relations and cultural differences are two of the primary reasons churches are racially divided. We

see one another's race first before we see each other as Christians. Those who have never had the opportunity to worship with other Christians outside of their home congregation, for example, fail to realize that tradition is a relative term. I may lead a song that is traditional to me, but new to someone else. A person's race should have no bearing on how he or she is viewed. We need to gain an appreciation or even celebrate cultural differences rather than continue to criticize or condemn them.

We Need to Cultivate Love

Although a partial reason churches are not racially or culturally diverse may be due to traditional disagreements in doctrine, I think it has more to do with the fact that members of the church do not love each other the way we should. In fact, it's been my experience that there are Christians who would rather not even associate with those from other races, in or outside of the church.

When I love my brother or sister in Christ, I mean really love them, I don't care what color they are or to which ethnic group they belong. It doesn't matter that culturally we may not have a lot in common. That's okay. Because if I truly love them I will learn to accept or even appreciate the differences. If we disagree on an issue, that's all it is, a disagreement; not a condemnation.

Church members need to: (1) pray for the spirit of humility and acknowledge that their opinions are just that, theirs, and that there was only One who is perfect; (2) love and

care for others, not judge them or be intolerant; (3) follow the biblical principles of going to a brother that may have offended you in love, not in judgment. When we can do this, our churches will have only begun to address the issue of diversity in the church.

Not everyone grew up in a brick house in the city surrounded by concrete, street lights, and a few thousand police officers. People really did live in houses like the Brady Bunch and out in the country like the

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JUNE 1969

Of Wine and Wineskins

David Elkins

Nor does anyone pour new wine into used wineskins. If we do, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. No! Fresh skins for new wine. -Mark 2:22, Today's English Version.

Today, as perhaps never before in the history of denominationalism the churches are in foment. Concerned members as well as ministers are crying out for spiritual renewal. Traditional doctrines are no longer accepted simply because they wear the hoary beard of age. "Sacred

Andy Griffith show. People sing songs I don't know, enjoy sermons that are not very long, and worship God without saying "amen" or "praise the Lord" out loud. I accept that.

Some like to clap after a baptism, or have it quiet during the communion; I accept that also. Why? Because I believe these differences pass the test of the real question: Does God accept them? The Christian family and Christian culture allow for this kind of diversity, and I wouldn't have it any other way. ✿

cars" are being dissected, analyzed, and re-evaluated. Orthodoxy is being eyed with as much suspicion and distrust as was heterodoxy a few years ago. Thousands of concerned people are joining hands, hearts, and minds in an effort to find the real essence of our relationship to Christ and one another. To achieve this goal, they are crossing sectarian lines, digging for truth through the dust of 2,000 years of religious tradition, and unapologetically casting aside the superfluous external trappings of what was once simply "the church."

Church of Christ people and other heirs of the Restoration Movement should be thrilled with the unparalleled

opportunities for communication, understanding, and mutual truth-seeking with these urgently concerned people. Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and other Restoration leaders would have

PERHAPS THE GREATEST SINGLE MISTAKE WE CAN MAKE IS TO SIT SNUGLY AND SMUGLY IN OUR LITTLE RELIGIOUS SUBCULTURE AND CONTINUE TELLING OURSELVES THAT WE HAVE NOTHING TO LEARN FROM ANYBODY BECAUSE WE HAVE "THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH."

rejoiced to see our day. Perhaps the greatest single mistake we can make is to sit snugly and smugly in our little religious subculture and continue telling ourselves that we have nothing to learn from anybody because we have "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." In taking such a separatist attitude, we deprive others of the knowledge we do possess and deprive ourselves of the criticism, testing, and evaluation which we need in order to develop a more accurate picture of ourselves and our theology.

Two of the most pertinent issues being discussed today are fellowship and the nature of the church. Keith Miller has written a very incisive book entitled *The Taste of New Wine* in which he sets forth his personal witness to the spiritual strength which is generated in small groups of Christ-loving people, who meet informally for periods of intensive fellowship. Miller's book is in reality a timely comment on fellowship and the nature of the church as they should be. The freshness, vitality, and spiritual "alive-ness" which characterizes this new movement has led Miller to call it "the

new wine."

Though the majority of religious people are still saying that "the old wine is better," it is an indisputable fact that the winepress is turning, and there are many people thirstily drinking the new wine as it spills forth. Humorously enough, some of the thirstiest imbibers are those in a prominent position of orthodoxy. One might call them "closet drinkers." Stifled and parched by the dust of tradition hurled at (or by) them from the Sunday School and pulpit, they are finding that the "new wine" has the paradoxical effect of quenching their thirst and at the same time causing them to desire more. It is only a matter of time until these people become so intoxicated by the "new wine" that their fellows will notice their unorthodox staggering and demand that they either "sober up" or relinquish their position as a representative and salesperson of the "old wine."

But what does all this have to do with the Church of Christ? First, we are involved in the religious revolution of our times—whether we like to admit it or not. A new breed of young preachers is appearing on the scene. They are not nearly so convinced of the 100% purity of Church of Christ doctrine as were the preachers of the last generation. Almost without knowing it, these young men have been influenced by the educational revolution of our day which says, "Test! Analyze! Evaluate!" It is foolish and unrealistic to expect young people to apply this philosophy to every other facet of their lives and then submissively accept each

religious bromide which falls from the lips of an Elizabethan-speaking ecclesiastic who is so far behind the times that he thinks Petula Clark is a flower garden.

As one whose age allows him still to be identifiable with the "younger generation," I can personally testify to the stifling and sterile atmosphere in which the Church of Christ often surrounds its young. I can only plead with the older and more influential brethren to change this atmosphere. To those who are convinced that "dangerous liberals" are at large among us, my pleading will only be interpreted as an attempt to change "God's eternal truth and kingdom." Hopefully, to those who think more objectively, it will be regarded as a plea for the Church of Christ to rid itself of suicidal tendencies. When a system makes no provisions for youth, it is only killing itself. That system can exist only until the generation in power dies off.

As a young preacher who shares kindred feelings with hundreds of other young preachers, allow me to speak representatively: We love the Lord and His truth as much as our Christian maturity allows. We want to discard or change nothing which is really sacred and eternal. But you must realize that we have our own truth-seeking to do, our own spiritual lives to direct, and our own salvation

to work out. We need your help, but it is often lacking. Your scorching words are futile. Your time-worn denunciations are impressive but leave our questions unanswered. Your branding and

WE WANT TO DISCARD OR CHANGE NOTHING WHICH IS REALLY SACRED AND ETERNAL. BUT YOU MUST REALIZE THAT WE HAVE OUR OWN TRUTH-SEEKING TO DO . . .

disfellowshipping leaves us hurt but unhelped. For the sake of Christ, unity, peace, and our souls, please love us, understand us, and even condescend once in a while to listen to us. Forgive our youthful rashness and impatience. Gently lead us back to the narrow path instead of breaking our skulls with a two-by-four when we seem to be out of line. Answer, as best you can, our heart's questions instead of cutting our tongues out to keep us from asking them. But most of all, put your arms around our shoulders; stand by our side; help us fight our innermost battles; guide us into, or seek with us, a consistent and relevant theology.

In the Church of Christ hundreds of young people as well as many older ones have tasted the new wine. We would like to pour it into the wineskins which you offer us. But if those skins are rigid, inflexible, unyielding, and tradition-bound, the new wine will surely break them; and you, we, and the Lord will be the losers. ❀

David Elkins is one of Integrity's founding editors and the author of Beyond Religion: A Personal Program for Building a Spiritual Life Outside the Walls of Traditional Religion (Quest, 1998). He is currently on sabbatical from his professorship at Pepperdine University. We were curious to hear his comments on what changes he believes have occurred since he wrote this piece; however, because of his sabbatical, he was not able to respond to us. In the meantime, we offer his early article to you as we found it: it sounds almost as if it could have been written by any of our young people today. Although we can't wait to ask him who Petula Clark is. --Mgng, Ed.



Unity

Joyce Poole Haner

Jesus, weep again.

Your earth vision was true:
We of Your Name are blind to the body.
Groping for You, we flail at one another,
trampling the parts in righteous discord,
With sightless wails, we call Your name;
Visionless, we miss the power, only to demand,
"Master, who do you love the best?"

Name me. Name me.
I know the rules—I have played the right games.
I am not like the others—I keep my self clean.
I can recite why you must
Name me. Name me.
Call me beloved, son, daughter, saved, alone,
Name me. Name me. Name only me.
Only me.
Me.

Jesus weeps again.

Spirit: send us a Peter with vision afresh
and sheet of sail-cloth, slung from the sky.
Challenge us Gentiles with our own
unclean beasts to devour the blinders
that fetter our vision of who are our sisters and brothers.

So from that new rooftop, united as one, we cry,

"Jesus, weep no more!"



Women in God's Plan

J. Bruce Kilmer

Part 1: Women in the Bible

The Old Testament teaches us much about the nature of God. It is the inspired record of God working out his eternal plan for us. From the Old Testament we learn about God's long suffering, loving, merciful nature. We see the beginning of his plan for our redemption. The God revealed to us in the Old Testament is the same God further revealed in the New Testament. Through Christ, we can see the promises of God more clearly than those who "welcomed them from a distance" (Heb. 11:13). Furthermore, in this era of God's history, the Holy Spirit dwells in all who belong to his Son (Romans. 8:9). However, God is still the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We need to remember this truth as we study the Old Testament.

Monarchy, Polygamy and War

There are numerous practices recorded in the Old Testament which are not necessarily God-ordained or which are not necessarily the result of compliance with God's law or ideal for his people. Monarchy, polygamy, and war are practices which most would agree are not favored by God. He may use those involved in such

practices for his purposes, but the practices can still be sinful. The Old Testament faithfully reports the truth about those practices, about the people involved in such practices, about the working of God in spite of such practices, and about God's use of the practices themselves.

God told Samuel that the people's request for a king was not a rejection of Samuel but a rejection of God. He told Samuel to warn them about the dangers of having a king. But when the people would not listen, God allowed Samuel to give them a king (1 Sam. 8:4-22). This king was even anointed by God (1 Sam. 10:1). Is monarchy to be preferred over democracy and representative government today?

David had numerous wives and Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines. In spite of this, God used these kings for his eternal purposes. Few would argue that polygamy or extra-marital affairs should be tolerated by the church today.

God used war many times in the Old Testament to fulfill his purpose. However, he often showed Israel by its victories and defeats that they should not trust in their own weapons and power for winning wars. Remember Gideon and his 300 men with trumpets and jars against the

multitude of Midianites, Amalekites and all the people of the East (Judges. 7). When Israel did not rely on God, it was defeated over and over again by the

DEBORAH, MIRIAM, AND ESTHER SHOW US THAT GOD WORKS THROUGH FEMALE AS WELL AS MALE LEADERSHIP.

Philistines. I Samuel 4-6 records a rout of Israel, the capturing of the ark of the covenant, and the fleeing of Israeli soldiers before the army of the Philistines. But in I Samuel 7, after Israel's repentance, the Lord thundered with a mighty voice and threw the Philistines into confusion so that Israel could defeat them. Israel often forgot (as we often do today) the words David spoke when he met Goliath:

that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand (1 Sam. 17:47).

The "arms" Israel was to lean on were God's "everlasting arms," not their own arms and weapons. It is the same for us today. We are not to rely on the bombs and electronic weapons systems of the United States, but the power of God. Though God uses war, it is not a human activity with which he is pleased. David was not allowed to build the Temple because he was involved in so many deaths — deaths that were the result of God being with him in battle (1 Chron. 28:3-4). God has made it clear that there will come a day when people will beat their swords into plowshares and when the lion will lie down with the lamb (Is. 2:4 and 11:6-9).

Patriarchy

What about patriarchy? Is this the eternal, God-ordained way for God to deal with his people and for the exercise of earthly authority?

The creation stories in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 do not hint at any kind of patriarchy. The creation of humans is as male and female in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The woman is made as a suitable helper (Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word translated helper is often used in the Old Testament to refer to God as a helper. The first mention of any authority of the man over the woman is in Genesis 3:16, and this is a description of the results of the disobedience of the woman and man.

Is patriarchy the result of sin or is it God's eternal purpose and plan for authority? The Old Testament writers recorded the events of history as they happened, not as they should have happened ideally. Thus, we read of the many wars by and against Israel, the many wives of David and Solomon, the good and bad kings of the divided kingdom, and the good and bad patriarchs. Deborah, Miriam, and Esther show us that God works through female as well as male leadership.

Women in the New Testament

The New Testament was written in a time when most women were little more than property. Some were required to wear veils in public. The majority had little education and few rights. Thousands of years of patriarchy had taken its toll. If there

were to be a change, female leadership would have to emerge slowly. Both Jesus and Paul set the stage for the advancement of women. Jesus had women supporters and followers. Paul worked side-by-side with women missionaries, teachers, leaders, and apostles. Paul lists a few in Romans 16:

Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia (a feminine name translated for years as masculine — Junia was probably referred to as an apostle, Romans 16:7), Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus' mother, Julia, and Nereus' sister. Two women, Euodia and Syntyche labored side by side with Paul (Eph. 4:2). Paul declared that in Christ there was neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Yet today, despite these examples, we have interpreted I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-15 as describing God's eternal principles, while we have reduced Galatians 3:28 to a reference for who can be saved.

However, from the context of each passage, it is Galatians 3:28 that states the eternal principle, while I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-15 are obviously addressed to specific and temporary situations. In Galatians 3:28 Paul is describing the results of the gospel:

in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. He was not just saying that Greeks, slaves, and women could be saved; no one doubted that. He was saying that in Christ the old distinctions of power, authority, and inequality were not to be made.

In I Corinthians 11:5 Paul refers to women praying, therefore, the "silence" of I Corinthians 14:34 must not be literal. In I Timothy 2:12, it appears that Paul is trying to correct an abuse of authority, not give instructions to every female in the church for all time.

The Results of the Gospel

Paul learned from his conversion to Christ to no longer regard anyone from a human point of view (II Cor. 5:16). He told the Corinthians that in Christ they were a "new creation." This meant that the old ways had passed away (II Cor. 5:17). The old ways included not only the old law, but such things as polygamy, patriarchy, and all types of immorality (sins of commission and omission). Galatians 2:11-21 and Ephesians 2:11-22 illustrate that one of the results of the gospel is the breakdown of the conflict between different races and nationalities. Paul made it clear that Christians were not only saved, but they (including

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Peter—whom Paul opposed to his face for not eating with Gentiles) were to treat the Gentiles as equals. Being part of the new creation does not end with our personal justification, it has social consequences. If the gospel had social consequences for the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, it makes sense that the gospel has social consequences for the relationship of men and women. Galatians 3:28 describes those consequences, not just who can be saved.

Romans 5:12-21 and I Corinthians 15:20-22; 45-49 tell us that the things that came by the first Adam were done away with by the second Adam, Christ. Sin came from Adam and Eve and the serpent's influence on them. Their sin resulted in the curse of the ground, pain in childbirth, and the role of the

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husbands over their wives (Genesis 3:14-19). We do all we technologically can to reduce toil in farming and pain in childbirth, why not do all we can to reduce rule of husbands over their wives?

Part 2: *Women in the Church Today*

The church's advocacy for the equality of women does not have to be just an influence of the "Feminist Movement" or the desire to imitate current culture. It can be based on an understanding of eternal biblical principles and a desire to realize more fully the results of the New Creation instead of the results of the Fall.

Today's church lives with the inconsistency of accepting the equality of men and women in some areas but not others. Most Christians believe it is appropriate for women to sing "in church," the silence of I Corinthians 14:34-35 notwithstanding. Most believe women can attend "church" without a veil, the admonition of I Corinthians 11:5 notwithstanding. Many Christians think it appropriate for women to lead prayer or singing, or to teach. Some even believe

women can preach or hold office in "the church." But most conservative evangelical churches stop short of full equality for women, though many claim that women and men are equal with different roles. Interestingly, the role differences usually involve men having the final authority, or holding certain "offices," or being given certain gifts; hardly equality in the way we usually use the term.

The Church of Christ stops far short of most evangelical churches in the roles it allows women. Most Churches of Christ do not allow women to pray aloud or even serve communion (which has become a sign of authority rather than a service). Some Churches of Christ do not allow women to make prayer requests aloud "in church." Some do not allow women to attend business meetings. Teaching classes of male adults or even baptized male children is usually not allowed.

But the Church of Christ is far from consistent. Women can teach adult males through the writing of articles. They can lead prayers in small groups or in a home, though some churches would not go even that far. Most Churches of Christ allow women to read Scriptures in a class setting but not "in church."

Church/World Dichotomy

It is the 'in church' rules which warp the logic of the distinctions of what women are allowed to do and not do. This warped logic is very harmful to the church. It says that we have 'church' rules and everyday life rules. It encourages us to not bring Christian values into our everyday life.

Having one set of rules for "church" and one for the world, or even for "after church" is not justified in the Bible, and contributes to a lack of understanding of the nature of the Christian Way which permeates every moment of life. As Alton Thompson explains in his article in the Jan./Feb. 1987 issue of *Integrity*, there should be no secular/religious dichotomy for Christians.

We are willing to allow equality in some areas (mainly outside the church), but we are sure to maintain male control in our churches. Why? Is it because we believe this is God's eternal way, or is it because both males and females are afraid of giving up male control? Because we have accepted equality in so many areas, I believe we are holding on to inequality in the church out of fear of worldly influence, fear of the unknown, and fear of a loss of identity.

What We Accept

We have given up veils. We accept education for girls and women, and our daughters are growing up in an educational environment of equality. Even Christian schools allow girls to run for student council, to deliver speeches, and to participate in sports. A majority of Christian women work outside of the home and expect equal pay for equal work. We allow Christian women professors in Christian colleges to teach college males everything from biology to Shakespeare. Many men answer to women bosses. We have Christian women who are bank presidents, school principals, district attorneys,

police officers, soldiers, and government representatives. In our daily lives, Church of Christ women vote, receive Ph.D.s, supervise males and females, lead, teach, instruct, serve, counsel, plan, and give.

Yet when women walk through our church doors, they suddenly become second-class citizens. They may be college professors, but they are usually not allowed to teach an adult Sunday School class to both sexes. They may have risked their lives for our country as soldiers, but they cannot serve communion or even pass the collection basket in our churches. They may offer leadership and wise counsel Monday through Saturday, but on Sunday they must be quiet.

How Long?

Recently I read the following announcement in a church bulletin: "Our potluck will be at noon, today, and men, our meeting to discuss our work at (City) will follow immediately." How long will women with leadership gifts

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and wise counsel continue to be content cooking for potlucks and washing the dishes, while the men discuss the "church business?" How long can we continue to make decisions without the input of women in our meetings? How long will we quench the gifts of preaching, teaching, exhorting, and leading in our female members? How long will we be comfortable in worship services where women with insights into God's Word are kept silent?

How long will we be comfortable being served communion by men and boys, while the woman next to us, who is given responsibility outside the church doors, is never allowed to participate in serving the communion except to pass the bread and cup to the person next to her? This may sound like a small and unimportant type of participation, but our omission of women in this weekly observance is a vivid, visual sign to visitors and to our young girls that they are not equal when it comes to public church participation. It is symbolic of a deeper problem. We are uncomfortable with any kind of visible leadership by women. How long will those men who know in their hearts that the treatment of women in the church has been wrong, continue to be silent?

How long before our women see the inconsistency and move to where they can use all of their Holy Spirit-given gifts, not just the gifts we have decided they may use? If the women do not leave, you can be sure the girls with leadership gifts will not stay after they grow up. The church will not have any credibility if we continue to accept equality for women everywhere but in the church. Honesty and consistency demand that if we do not allow women leaders in the church, we cannot accept women leaders in the world. Because for the Christian there is no Christian/world dichotomy in the way we live.

Biblical Consistency

We cannot live one way six days a week and then suddenly change when we

enter through the church doors. And this is where our understanding of the nature of the church fails. There is not one set of rules for our daily lives and a different set for the church. We are supposed to be the church seven days a week. The nature of our lives does not change when we are in "church activities" and when we are at work or home. We are who we are—in church, at home, and in the work place. We do not leave our gifts at the church door. We are the new creation moment-by-moment, and we worship moment-by-moment, not just in "worship services" (Romans 12:1).

In Christ, we do not have to fear loss of our identity. As part of the new creation, we no longer regard ourselves or others from the old human point of view. Instead, we slowly learn to discern who we really are through Christ's eyes, eliminating distinctions based upon race, economic status, or gender.

The church will only reach the level of maturity which Paul describes in Ephesians 4:7-13 when we realize the eternal principle of Galatians 3:28 and fully utilize all the gifts of women in our churches. Therefore, let us create a church atmosphere where all are free to use their gifts given by God. When our churches create an environment where all of its members may use all of their gifts, then the church will be on its way to being all it was intended to be! ✿



NOVEMBER 1976

Lazarus Redivivus

Elton Higgs

My life is a stench to the Pharisees,
As was my corpse before the call
Arresting worm and rot.
Another voice might not have pierced
The mist of life almost forgot,
But His was both a plea of love
And a Lord's command.
And strand of life was thus reknit,
And now I sit at home again,
While those who deem Him neither
Friend nor Lord embrace decay.

Because He snatched me back,
And now I limp between two worlds,
I understand the calm with which
He faces those who fear the Voice of Life
And seek to spread their inner rot.
What they plot to take from Him—and me—
Is only lost by choice.
Dear as are my sisters and this home,
The best of all that's here
Is but enhanced by death.

Yet a shadow beyond my ken
Sits deep within His eyes;
He contemplates a pain beyond the grave,
Where He must sacrifice awhile
The vision that brought me back.
Somehow I know that Voice
Of Love and Force will speak to all
Across a greater gulf than spanned for me,
And men can then from inner rot be free.

July 4, 1976

Bruce Kilmer grew up in the Church of Christ (a cappella), graduated from Abilene Christian University, and has served as an elder in the Christian Church (independent). Currently, he lives in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, where he is the Regional State Court Administrator for the Michigan Supreme Court. He co-edited Integrity with his wife, Diane, for over ten years.



THIRTY YEARS OF INTEGRITY

It was a great party

Those of us who know *Integrity*—readers, writers, supporters, board members, past and present—know that this little journal creates a special kind of fellowship through the written word. When we get together as the Board of this journal to pray and plan for each issue of *Integrity*, we often wish we could have fellowship in person with more of our readers, authors, and supporters. We receive many letters and e-mails with the same wish.

What a joyful and edifying gathering we had as we celebrated *Integrity's* thirtieth birthday this past Labor Day weekend. We were so pleased to see so many readers join us as we praised God for his faithfulness and his continued provision for this ministry. We also were privileged to hear from former editors Hoy Ledbetter, Diane Kilmer, and Joseph Jones, and from author and old friend of *Integrity* Leroy Garrett.

This intimate gathering of like-minded believers, all of whom are so deeply committed to Christian unity, was inspirational! If you were not able to be with us but would like to purchase a set of tapes, these are available. Please e-mail inquiries regarding tapes to noreen@integrityjournal.org (or write in care of the address on the back of the journal).

Thank you, dear reader, for your continued faithfulness to this journal. After celebrating thirty years, we have spent time planning and praying for the next years' worth of issues, and we look forward to sharing the work of many good writers with you. You'll be receiving our annual appeal letter shortly; we would appreciate your financial support as we enter the new year. In the meantime, please keep us in your prayers; you are in ours every time we meet as a Board.

In Jesus' service,
The *Integrity* Board of Directors



Joseph F. Jones



Diane G. H. Kilmer



Hoy Ledbetter



Leroy Garrett



If you like to write and would like to submit materials for any of these upcoming issues, please do so!

We think it's important to feature the work of all types of writers, whether your vocation is homiletics or housework; exegesis or engineering.

For more details on the specific subject matter of each issue and for any other submission guidelines, please e-mail our Managing Editor at [<noreen@integrityjournal.org>](mailto:noreen@integrityjournal.org).

We are here to serve you. If *Integrity* can minister to you by featuring articles on a specific topic, please let us know.



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Manuscripts due January 15, 2001