

WINTER/SPRING 2001
VOLUME 31, NUMBER 4



Reconciliation Forgiveness

Gluing ourselves
back together

"Therefore, as God's chosen people,
holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with
compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and
forgive
whatever grievances

you may have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you:
And over all these virtues
put on love,
which binds them together
in perfect unity."

-Colossians 3: 12-14

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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.

Winter/Spring 2001
Vol. 31, Number 4

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God does the healing

There it was: wretched, terrible thing lying before me! I could not bring myself to touch it, let alone pick it up. It was supposed to be a gift. Why? I do not know. Maybe because of guilt. Maybe because of confession. Who knows? I did not, and I did not care.

I only knew that my aching heart could not embrace it. My pained soul could not receive it as a gift. My hurt pride could not acknowledge the giver. Here I was motionless, unsure as to my next move. And there it was, motionless, mocking my very being: "And you call yourself a minister!"

But I did not want the gift. It was offered by an enemy. I do not trust an enemy and I certainly do not want a gift from an enemy. But there it was: new, unopened, begging to be received with thanksgiving and used daily. It was a devotional Bible, bound in leather with gold edges. How much more holy of a thing can one receive? And how much more unholy could one get than I?

How can I even have an enemy? I am a minister. Am I not supposed to love all people? How could this be happening? Eventually, I was able to take the despicable thing home and shove it under my bed at home. And there it laid for months: a silent, poison doing its deadly work daily.

This daily tincture of strychnine, slowly poisoning my soul and withering my spirit was taking its toll. I seemed fine. I could function. But I was unaware of the buildup of deadly poison in my soul. I was unaware of Satan's insidious work on my heart.

The point came when it seemed I could no longer breathe. I had to leave town to breathe and get some air. I went to a Benedictine monastery and participated in the daily liturgy. The chanting, the prayers, the ambiance began to allow the Great Physician to heal my soul. The balm of Gilead began doing His healing work.

But the moment of miraculous healing came one afternoon. In utter despair and agony, in complete angst of soul, I flung myself beneath a large Scotch pine and in complete abandonment and surrender cried out to God. Free me from this poison! Give me the life flowing water of the Spirit. Cleanse my soul!

I was not prepared for the freedom that followed. And what a sweet freedom it was! Free from unforgiveness. Free from bitterness! Free from the bondage of a sinful, prideful heart. Free from self. Free to forgive once again! Free to feel once again! Free to care once again!

And now the question most asked: How did I know I had come to the

point of true forgiveness? For me the answer was simple: I was able to pull that Bible out from under my bed and use it for my daily devotions. It was a tangible, empirical, practical way for me to be sure and know that I had truly forgiven.

God continues to heal

And not long after that God continued to heal my broken heart and spirit. One Sunday a deacon read from 1 Corinthians 13 in preparation for the communion meal. "Love keeps no record of wrongs." That was exactly what I had been doing! I had a wonderful list tucked away in the folds of my memory. I was just waiting for the opportune time to pull out that list and use it against my "enemy." But love says, "No!" I could not do that. The eucharistic presence of Jesus in that mysterious, miraculous moment said, "No." I could not do that.

I began to pray fervently and quickly while another prayer was being said to bless the bread and the wine. The body of Christ was being hurt by my attitude of unforgiveness and keeping a record of wrongs. The broken body of Christ (his pain, agony, dying) was for me. The blood flowing from His body was for me. It is amazing how quickly God heals the soul. I wanted to be right so I could commune with my Jesus and my brothers and sisters at the banquet table of the kingdom that morning.

It was through the contemplative experience of a retreat and the communal experience of the eucharist that God healed my poisoned spirit.

Double pain

There is a double pain here: one of hurt and one of forgiveness. We understand the hurt, but I was unprepared for the pain of forgiveness. It amounted to letting go of a wrong that I was nursing. It reminded me of a baby nursing its bottle filled with milk, but the milk, unknown to the baby, is laced with poison. I was clinging so tightly to the very thing killing me. And there were withdrawal symptoms associated with addictive substances.

Letting go. I had to let go. I had to let go to survive. I had to let go to live.

It was an issue of power, and the Holy Spirit showed me clearly how deadly it was. Power. I wanted just enough to inflict the same kind of pain on my "enemy" as he had inflicted on me. I was demanding justice and wanted to see it carried out swiftly.

But I saw that a retained hurt turns into bitterness and hatred. This "frozen anger" deadens the soul to ministry. I could not pray in that state. I could not minister and care for another in that state. I was fooling no one, and I knew it.

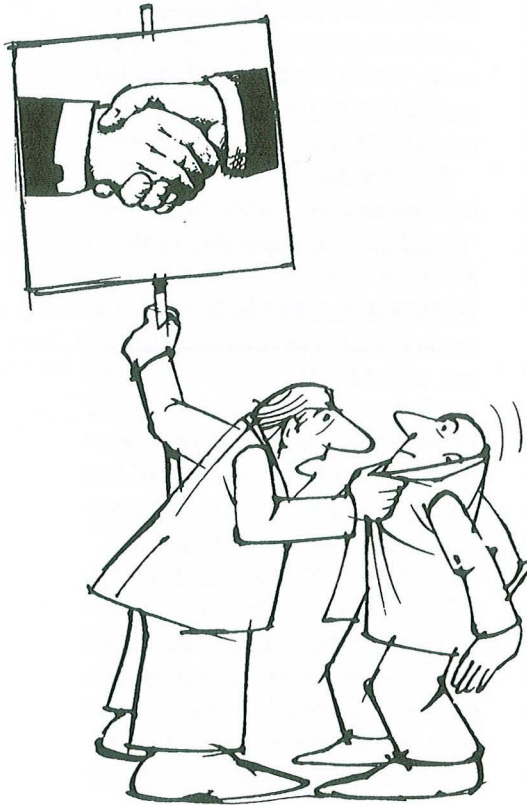
The dividing wall of hostility

The dividing wall of hostility: it doesn't have to be ethnically-centered as Paul talks about in Ephesians. For many of us the dividing wall of hostility is found in broken relationships. The wall is erected very carefully one stone upon another. The mortar is carefully plastered and the wall constantly surveyed for perfection. And that wall can be constructed so high, so wide,

so strong that only God in Almighty Omnipotence can bring it down. But for me, bring it down God did!

Dear reader, what is it that you need to forgive another for today?

- Intentional or unintentional slights?
- Betrayal?
- Neglect?
- Abuse-verbal, physical, sexual, emotional?
- Dishonesty?
- Horrendous crimes?
- Rumors and gossip?
- Marital infidelity?
- Religious snobbery?
- Ethnic pride?
- Power plays?



Forgiveness does not mean forgetting; it only means that the pain of the memory no longer immobilizes us or renders us unable to pray for the one who has hurt us.

Forgiveness at its heart is a theological issue, not merely a psychological one. The only way we can forgive is to pattern our life, attitudes, behavior, values, and heart after Jesus, the greatest example of forgiveness.

As you pick up this issue and read it, I want you to meditate and perhaps keep a journal on the following questions:

1. Who do I need to forgive today?
2. What is the hardest thing for me to forgive, and why?
3. In my own spiritual journey, how do I know I have truly forgiven another?

May God bless each of us as we take seriously our individual and particular ministries of reconciliation.

In Christian love,

Curtis D. McClane
Editor-in-Chief



REAL-LIFE APPLICATION

An Unforgettable Experience

Dr. Kenneth Johnson and Dr. Joseph F. Jones

Introduction

Fractured relationships between individuals can be horrendously complicated and painful. We've all experienced this to some degree. But what happens when entire groups of people are alienated from each other because of a conflict? We've all heard about, or maybe even experienced, the frustratingly tangled web of hurt and damage that a church split or a bitter congregational conflict can cause. When both people and institutions are involved, the problems just seem too big, too knotty, too complex ever to be solved. It is judged to be easier to sweep the problem under the carpet and move on until the pain fades with history. There is just so much at stake: Reopening old wounds. Reputations. Integrity. Power. Status. Funding. Under such circumstances, it would appear that reconciliation is not only unattainable, but not worth the risk. If we just don't talk about it, we reason, it will fade away.

Is this the way things ought to be in the Kingdom? Of course not, we reason. But if you've ever been involved in such a situation, you know how truly hopeless and insurmountable it can feel. Rarely do we hear about church reconciliations after a split, or organizations reuniting after conflict.

So does reconciliation ever really happen within and among organizations? It does, and we've seen it. This past October, we were privileged to witness a beautiful reconciliation between two groups who were courageous enough to bring a 30-year-old wrong to light in order to rectify it. The people of Rochester College, Rochester, MI, and the Troy, MI, Church of Christ joined together in an evening of reconciliation and healing—an evening where past wrongs were acknowledged and forgiveness was lovingly and sincerely given.

The most striking thing about this story to me is that the participants recognized the need for public reconciliation over 8 years ago; however, they chose to wait prayerfully for all those long years—patiently waiting for God's time to make amends.

This is a story of triumph, not of one group over another, but of Christ's love covering a multitude of sins. We offer it to you as an example of how our God works to mend relationships. We hope that the strength and personal integrity

of the participants, as well as their prayerful patience as they waited for God to work, is evident to you. Then, too, we offer this story as a beacon of hope to those who may be going through similar, seemingly hopeless, rifts in institutional relationships. The story begins with the following background, narrated by Joseph Jones. May you be blessed by the telling of this important piece of history. -Mgng. Ed.

The editors and Board of *Integrity* journal have asked that I submit a personal narrative giving the historic and theological context which led up to the memorable event of reconciliation at Rochester College (formerly known as Michigan Christian College), Rochester, MI, on Sunday night, October 1, 2000. It was with some reluctance that I finally agreed to this request, feeling that it would provide an essential frame of reference for understanding and appreciating the significance of what transpired on that emotional night.

How it all began

The Jones family (then numbering six) moved from Oklahoma to Dearborn, Michigan, in June 1963, after I completed seven years as Dean and Professor at Oklahoma Christian College (now University). Our call back to the North had two major motifs: the first and primary reason was to share in the life and ministries of Northwest Church, Dearborn, MI; and the second reason to assist the young and then struggling Michigan Christian College, both as faculty member and unofficial advisor to the president, Lucien Palmer, who had been my very personal friend since our college days at David Lipscomb College.

After some time had passed, Lucien and Ida Palmer met with my wife and me for a long and intensive prayer session at Northwest Church. (That night of praying went on for several hours—until the midnight hour!) In essence, my brother Lucien said, “God has laid it on my heart to bring you to Michigan Christian College, to help us get that college accredited, to strengthen and stabilize the faculty and administration, to make it a truly Christian institution, committed to academic excellence.” Lucien then laid on Geneva and me a heavy, yet loving ultimatum, saying, “Joseph, you must come, I will not take ‘No’ for an answer.”

It was with much conflict of heart and mind that we agreed to leave a most enjoyable and fruitful ministry at Northwest Church and become fully associated with President Palmer's plans for the future of that college. In that capacity, my administrative role was to serve as Academic Vice President and to lead in the achievement of Lucien's vision for the school. The accreditation program was intensified, requiring extensive travel on my part along with institutional self-studies, faculty recruitment, and library and curriculum development. I felt much personal gratification and joy in what was being accomplished.

The wall is built

In the spring of 1970 I was asked to conduct a week of evangelistic meetings with the then existing Lennon Road Church of Christ in Flint, MI, when the theological walls were thrown up around me, and I felt myself caught in a very undesirable situation with the elders of that church, necessitating termination of my part in that effort after only four days of preaching. (I was asked to discontinue the rest of the meeting, since my views were considered too “liberal.”) While I felt grieved and concerned that our “gospel meeting” had come to an abrupt halt, I sincerely believed that was the end of the matter (perhaps a little naively).

I continued on in my work with Michigan Christian College without any knowledge that, resulting from that gospel meeting, rumors, gossip, and talk were taking place among some “leading preachers” of the area and the college's Board of Directors. This festered until the summer of 1970 when matters had reached a peak of tension and concern with the Board.

A vote of confidence

I met with the Board by their request in June 1970, and after several hours of intensive, self-disclosing interaction, the Board gave me a unanimous vote of confidence as an effective and competent academic administrator and a faithful, trustworthy gospel preacher, teacher and professor.

Discharged

From that date I continued into the 1970-71 academic year, wholly unaware of the devious plans to have me dismissed from the college. Early in August 1971, after meeting with President Palmer to map out a new five/ten year plan, he informed me regretfully that while my vision and plans for the college were most gratifying, the sad and serious news he had for me from the Board was that my contract would not be renewed. My association with the college would terminate at the end of August.

Trying to minimize the impact of this decision on the college community and the fellowship of churches in Michigan, Lucien advised that I submit a letter of resignation. This I refused to do feeling it was dishonest. I would prefer the news being released truthfully: I was being discharged.

I heard nothing from the Board for three months, when I finally received a three-sentence letter from the secretary of the Board, Dr. George Ford, to the effect that “since I did not communicate with the Board they had no other course of action but to terminate my contract.” (This letter came only after numerous calls on my part to both the Board chairman, Wheeler Utley and secretary, Dr. Ford.)

Total Isolation

From that moment I, along with the Troy Church of Christ, with which I had been associated now for several years, was totally isolated. I must recognize again after all these years

how the Troy Church, along with the encouragement of William (Bill) Palmer and Gene Cowie, stood faithfully behind me. Several of the presidents that succeeded President Palmer even publicly forbade students and/or faculty to attend or have any part in the life of the Troy Church.

Reconciliation

With the coming of Dr. Kenneth Johnson to the presidency of the college some eight years ago, the theological climate of Michigan Christian College began to change, and he initiated efforts to bring about

reconciliation between the college and Troy Church, and to rectify some of the personal wrong that I had experienced since August 1971. Dr. Johnson and I began meeting and talking about such plans for reconciliation and restoring of fellowship, but never felt the time appropriate until the Fall of 2000.

The rest of the story is told in the documents which follow. My prayers will continue for the daily strengthening of our spiritual bonds in Christ. I thank God daily, the God of all comfort, mercy, and grace, for what transpired, and will give Him all the glory and honor.

Remarks of Dr. Kenneth Johnson, President, Rochester College at the Opening of the Annual Rochester College Lectureship, October 1, 2000

About seven or eight years ago at the fall Bible lectureship, the College began recognizing and honoring ministry couples who had spent at least forty years serving congregations of the Church of Christ in the north. Over the last eight years we have honored perhaps thirty such couples.

In the early years of this activity, it was on our hearts to honor the man and woman whom we are honoring tonight. At that time, more than half a decade ago, I visited with the minister being honored tonight, telling him of the desire of my heart. As he and I visited about the possibility, we realized that the timing just didn't seem right on God's calendar, and

neither he nor I wanted to force the timing. Now, however, the time does seem right, and we have been planning this occasion for more than a year.

Tonight, as we honor Dr. Joseph Jones, long-time minister at the Troy Church of Christ, and Mrs. Jones, we have some formal comments to make, comments that were reviewed a few months ago by the Board of Trustees of Rochester College.

Would Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Jones please come to the platform.

Formal Comments

Navigating the stream of life is more difficult in turbulent water than in calm water. What is clear in today's calmness may in times past have been difficult to

see. So, on occasions like tonight, it is wise in tranquillity to reflect on past times.

Perhaps thirty years ago, Dr. Joseph E. Jones was serving as the Academic Dean at Michigan Christian College, now Rochester College. He was an effective administrator and a popular teacher. Then the water became turbulent.

In a time of sharp theological disagreement and division among members of the Church of Christ, the college, experiencing pressure from some in the church, terminated Dr. Jones' employment and, for a period exceeding twenty years, accommodated isolation from fellowship with Dr. Jones and the Troy, Michigan, church where he labored.

Perhaps seven years ago, both the Troy church and the college began taking actions to restore our relationship, and today, thankfully, that relationship is fully restored. Today the Troy church and the college enjoy a fine spirit of mutual confidence, and

many college employees are now a part of the Troy church.

Nothing now can be done to remove the pain endured and which lingers from decades of broken fellowship. But:

- We can publicly put to rest that phase of our past,
- We can and do publicly express our apology to Dr. Jones, his Godly wife Geneva, their children, and the Troy church for the pain caused by events in the past,
- We can publicly re-express our desire and commitment to be in fellowship with all who are in the Body of Christ, and
- We can recognize two persons who have given their entire adult lives in full-time Christian service.

And so tonight, this I first day of October 2000, we humbly honor Dr. Joseph E. Jones and his wife Geneva for their patient long-suffering and for their fifty-eight years of ministry in the Kingdom of God, including thirty-two years with the Troy Church of Christ.

Jones' Response to Dr. Johnson's Statement Sunday, October 1, 2000

Dr. Johnson, Members of the Board of Directors of Rochester College, Administration, Faculty, Fellow Christians:

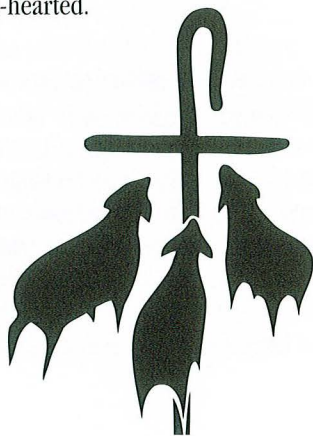
Although I believe strongly in the working of God in all the situations of life, I have never in the past twenty-nine years of my life dared dream that

such a night as this might be realized. The honor which you have bestowed on me and my dear wife, Geneva, we graciously accept; and the genuine apology you have expressed concerning wrongs and hurts of the past has touched the inner core of our beings. But no amount of words or eloquence of language can contain the emotions

which we experienced when Dr. Johnson first informed us of what was planned for this evening. (I appreciate our brother, Elton Albright, who first notified me of Dr. Johnson's plans.)

Allow me to be very clear, first of all, to acknowledge that none of the present College Board or Administration were a part of these past events which our brother, Kenneth Johnson, has alluded to; but it is biblical and at times appropriate for a present generation to confess corporately for the sins and hurts of past generations.

When I was summarily terminated from my administrative role as Academic Vice President and my role as Professor of Bible and Church History of then Michigan Christian College without explanation or benefits, the wound and pain were almost more than I could bear; but my wife and I survived such pain only through the strength of God's indwelling Spirit, the unwavering support of the Troy Church of Christ, and countless friends and fellow believers across the nation. But we thank God that He is still in the healing business, that He still binds up the broken-hearted.



I never desired to question the integrity and sincerity of the Board of Directors when they made that decision to terminate my contract, since one year earlier they had unanimously given me a vote of confidence as an effective college administrator and teacher, and one who was sound in the Christian faith. I firmly believe now that it was made out of fear and desperateness about the college's financial future, coupled with theological distortions and unbridled rumors. But I assure you tonight before God, that I finally learned to pray for each member of the Board by name, and further that I asked forgiveness for each and every one who might in all sincerity have shared in that decision.

I humbly accept this apology for any and all the hurt inflicted on the Troy Church: the years of broken fellowship and isolation to which Dr. Johnson alluded. And in behalf of our elders and the entire congregation we praise God, thank Him, and to Him be the glory for what has transpired this night.

God bless Rochester College as it expands its ministries in the Kingdom of God; God bless my friend and brother, Dr. Kenneth Johnson, for his courage and commitment; God bless the Board of Directors and this competent and committed faculty; and God continue to bless the now beautiful Christian relationship between Troy Church of Christ and Rochester College. "To God be the glory, great things He has done." ❁



REAL-LIFE APPLICATION

Why am I Afraid?

D'Esta Love

March 1992

It is a familiar setting. It is the church that has nurtured me from my birth, and its beliefs, as well as its rhythms and practices, are ingrained in my very being and speak to who I am in my truest self. It is a setting pregnant with memory. It is the church at worship. It echoes the rich tones of singing, yea, even the sound of my own voice blended with those of the congregation. If I listen, I can almost hear the sermons of my husband, my father before him, and now my own son. This is a place that breathes comfort and blessing. This is where I belong. This is my family. I am at home here.

This particular occasion is a Sunday evening service with its characteristic informality and ease, and the church has gathered to pray. Our minister has set the tone for the evening with a litany of individual and communal needs and concerns, blessings and praise, and he has invited the congregation to join him in prayer. The invitation is clear and unmistakable, "Anyone who wants to may pray." There have been numerous times before in worship services and moments for spontaneous prayer when I excluded myself because I knew that "anyone" did not mean

"me." However, this time I am certain. I have been invited to pray.

As I sit beside my husband, I feel a growing eagerness and desire to give voice to the words welling up *for a lifetime* within me. But this is not the privacy of someone's home, or a gathering of women for a Bible class or special lecture series. This is the sanctuary of the gathered church at prayer, and I have been invited to participate in what, until now, has been forbidden in my religious experience. Can I, after fifty-two years, break the silence? I listen silently and with pounding heart as one by one, with complete freedom and spontaneity, men stand again and again from all corners of the auditorium to pray. I marvel at the apparent ease with which they pray and at their unhalting flow of words that resonate with a familiarity unknown to me, and I sit frozen. I wait, and no woman stands to pray, nor do I. It is intensely intimidating. After a lifetime of silence in the sanctuary of God, I cannot utter a word.

I want to pray, but I cannot

Suddenly and unexpectedly, I am caught in a deep, internal struggle. I have been given permission, and I want to pray, but I cannot. The tears that accompany the tightening in my

throat are of hurt, anger, shame, and fear. This is my church home; yet, for the first time in my life I feel fear in the house of God. I am surrounded by people who love me, and I am comfortable here. The minister has extended me an invitation to pray—so why am I afraid?

Why *am* I afraid?

I am afraid because my roots are deep in the soil of my faith and the religious tradition of my childhood. I am afraid because I do not want to shatter the calm or disturb the peace I feel in this place. I know that there are those present that will be offended if I pray—who will consider my prayer a violation of a direct command from the Word of God. The “forbidden” words I am about to utter could leave turmoil in their wake. I love this church and all it represents to me and others, and I do not want to harm it.

I AM ALSO AFRAID BECAUSE I DO NOT WANT AN IMPULSIVE ACT ON MY PART TO HINDER ANY PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE CONCERNING WOMEN AND THE UTILIZATION OF THEIR GIFTS IN THE KINGDOM.

I am afraid because of the memories that rush into my mind. I remember how I felt thirty years before when the elders removed Randy from my Sunday school class. He was ten years old and had been baptized the previous week. Thus, Randy was a baptized male believer, and it was

considered unsuitable for me, a woman, to continue teaching him the stories of Jesus. I also remember, several years later, when the elders of another congregation asked Stuart and me to teach a Wednesday night class in the church auditorium. At the conclusion of our lesson an individual stood and expressed his disapproval and declared that we had set a dangerous precedent. To conclude his remarks, he read 1 Peter 3:1-6. As I sat on the front pew before the congregation, the words exhorting a woman to adorn herself in “a gentle and quiet spirit” made me feel exposed and shameful, and they ring in my ears as I contemplate accepting this invitation to pray.

I am also afraid because I do not want an impulsive act on my part to hinder any progress that has been made concerning women and the utilization of their gifts in the kingdom. Yet, this is not impulsive. I have been invited to pray. So why am I afraid? I am afraid of hearing the sound of my solitary voice in this place of worship and among the congregation of the Lord. Although I hear the words of my prayer over and over in my silent self, I cannot speak them. After fifty-two years of silence, have I grown mute? Are there no words I can utter “to ascribe thee glory and honor”? Is it too late for me to bring my gift to the altar?

*What language
shall I borrow
to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow,
thy pity without end?*

September 1992

It is another familiar setting but less nurturing and comforting than the security and peace of the church at worship. It is Firestone Fieldhouse, the gymnasium on the campus of Pepperdine University. The occasion is our weekly convocation, and I have been asked by the president of the university to open the 1992-93 academic year with a prayer. As the Dean of Students, I have stood before this audience week after week for four years. I have presided over the program, introduced guest speakers and even shared my faith. Today, I have been asked to pray. It is a simple thing. So why am I afraid?

I am afraid because I have known of this assignment for weeks. It has been a weighty decision for the university, one that was made after two years of prayerful and diligent study. Although I had no part in making the decision, I participated in many of the discussions, and I am well aware of the sensitivity involved, as well as the possible ramifications. It has been a courageous decision for the university to make, and I anticipate it will be controversial. Until now, women have not been allowed to lead prayer or read scripture in our convocation programs. Today we are empowering our women to participate fully in the spiritual life of the university.

I am empowered by the significance of the moment, but I am apprehensive and fearful about the exposure, not just for the university, but for me. I know that my name will be attached to this prayer, and word of

my participation will spread. As the daughter of a preacher, I know too well the concern about what others will think. I fear my motives will be critiqued by people who do not know me, in places I have never been. I also know I will be labeled and judged

I AM EMPOWERED BY THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOMENT, BUT I AM APPREHENSIVE . . .

by individuals who do not know my heart. And I am fearful of censure from those who know and love me.

Why am I afraid? I am fifty-two years old, and yet I fear the disapproval of my parents. I know that my father always encouraged my mother and his daughters to pray at home. I also know he invited women to pray in the numerous women's Bible classes he taught (a bold move in his day). But I do not know what my parents will think about this decision and my part in it. On the other hand, I am concerned that this public prayer will bring criticism to my parents and their ministry, as well as to our son and his work in the Kingdom.

Why am I afraid? Due to the public nature of this prayer, I am once again haunted by memories of other public experiences in which I faced disapproval. On one such occasion, Stuart and I conducted a weekend seminar for a congregation and taught side by side in the “private” space of the fellowship hall. We were also asked to teach a combined adult Bible class on Sunday morning, conducted in the “public” space of the auditorium.

Stuart introduced our lesson, while I stood at his side. The moment I began to speak, part of the audience rose and walked out. I vividly remember how the minister, after the class was

I RECEIVED LETTERS FROM PEOPLE I DID NOT KNOW TELLING ME I SHOULD "HANG MY HEAD IN SHAME." HOWEVER, I RECEIVED FAR MORE LETTERS AND CALLS EXPRESSING ENCOURAGEMENT.

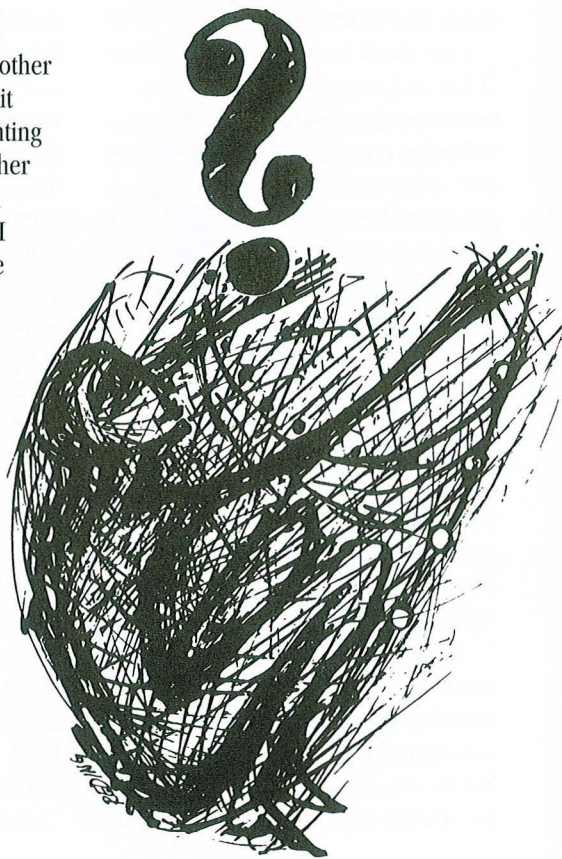
over, wept unabashedly as he extended his sincere and earnest apology to us. I also remember when we were introduced to a Wednesday night audience in the auditorium of another congregation. At the last minute, it occurred to the individual presenting us to "put it to a vote" as to whether I should be allowed to teach with Stuart. One person objected, so I was asked to remain seated while Stuart taught the class. These were uncomfortable moments, and I feel that discomfort today.

I feel the weight of the past and the responsibility placed in my hands as I await the beginning of convocation. I express my fears to Stuart, who stands beside me. His words ring clearer and truer than any others, "Do not be afraid. Forget about what others will think or say. When you step to the podium, just enter your closet and pray." I feel I am being called to courage. "Prince of Peace,

control my will; bid this struggling heart be still. Bid my fears and doubtings cease; hush my spirit into peace."

March 1996

I did step into my closet when I led that prayer in the fall of 1992, and it was a singular moment in my spiritual pilgrimage. A deep and abiding calm came over me, and I felt anointed by God's spirit. Since then, I have led other prayers in convocation. There have been other invitations to pray at Sunday evening services, and I have found the courage to respond. I am still



fearful, but I am less so. I am discovering that most of my fears are unfounded although a few are very real. News of my first prayer in convocation did appear in numerous church bulletins and journals. One headline read, "A Late Item on D'Esta Love of Pepperdine University." It informed the congregation that "There are indeed wolves among us" and concluded with a final pronouncement, "Depart from me, I NEVER knew you." I received letters from people I did not know telling me I should "hang my head in shame." However, I received far more letters and calls expressing encouragement.

I also found occasion to talk with my parents about my fears and my views concerning greater opportunities for women to use their gifts in the Kingdom. To my surprise, I found they were encouraging and supportive. I regretted I had not discussed these matters with them before, but I had been afraid. Their love and support have given me courage, and we have been liberated from fear to explore together with openness and trust the hidden and unspoken concerns of our hearts. The captives have been set free, for it is fear that enslaved us.

I am also encouraged by the prayers of other women and am discovering that I am not alone in my journey. I have found both men and women who are faithfully searching God's word to discover his will as we face the issues regarding Christian ministry for women

in the church. We are finding tools for the analysis of scripture that allow us to view the role of women in the larger context of scripture, rather than allow two heavily disputed passages to relegate women to a silent role.

Also, I am much less fearful today because I see positive change taking place. The days when Randy was removed from my Sunday school class are almost gone. Rarely are Stuart and I censured for teaching scripture together in any setting. Greater avenues of service are opening for women in the church, and we are doing a better job of helping men and women identify their gifts. We have more women in graduate Bible programs in our Christian colleges, preparing to give their lives to the service of the Lord, and I am confident He will find ways to use them. We live in a time of struggle and change, but I believe it is a time for courage and a time of hope.

This is my personal journey, and I am becoming more courageous in my faith. I do not mean to imply that I am "charging the gates"; I am not. But I am less content to hide behind my "walls of silence." I feel a sense of obligation to others who are making this journey, and I am empowered to make myself known. I am more secure in my understanding of scripture that calls me to witness to my faith, to lend my voice in praise to my Lord, to "lift up holy hands," and speak his name in prayer. ❀

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What's a Body to Do?

Elton Higgs

Tensions and conflict within social organizations develop because people have desires and objectives that clash with each other. Because different groups and individuals feel that they have an absolute right to satisfy those desires and pursue those objectives, even at the expense of others, the outcome of such conflicts is usually determined by which group or individual most effectively exercises power over the others. In one vein of worldly wisdom, this enforcement of a hierarchy is the only way to bring order to the society. There is another vein of worldly wisdom, however, that is less cynical, and that, indeed, expresses a kind of egalitarian idealism, based on the humanistic principle that “all men [read ‘people’] are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” as individuals. This Enlightenment ideal, soaringly and memorably expressed in our country’s Declaration of Independence and associated with the throwing off of tyranny, has evolved in our society into a kind of free-standing, self-validating individualism that trumps every other value and concern. Although the principle of individual rights is generally seen as a noble challenge to the raw exercise of arbitrarily established power, its dominance

poses a serious challenge to God’s way of dealing with relationships between people in the church, the Body of Christ. God makes no apology for speaking of His people as His Kingdom, with an absolute ruler and subjects who are to submit completely to His authority and will. But how are we to deal with this uncompromising terminology for the society of God’s people and the biblical principles that are drawn from it in an age where individual freedom and rights are assumed to be unchallengeable ideals? And how are the concepts of servanthood, obedience, and submission which are central to the New Testament church to be implemented without compromising the worth of individuals, which is also a vital part of the Gospel message?

An organism, not an organization

Perhaps close to the core of the problem is that the designation “church” has been attached to Christian societies in such a way as to define them as primarily political entities; it seems rather natural to speak of “Church polity,” but it is awkward to speak of “Body polity.” There is certainly nothing wrong with the word “church”—it is a biblical term that describes the aggregate of those who belong to Christ; but the

word has been appropriated and applied in ways that picture the church primarily as an organization, and not as the organism it truly is, i.e., the Body of Christ. I think it is necessary to emphasize the Church as Body in order to correct the impression that the dynamic of politics that obtains in human social organizations is appropriate and applicable for the Body of Christ. Within the Body of Christ, people relate to one another according to the model of their Master and King, and not according to the wisdom of the world.

Let me set out first what I see to be the implications of New Testament teaching on relationships in the Body of Christ, particularly for understanding how we deal with the seemingly contradictory principles of hierarchy and submission to authority, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, assertions of the equality of all Christians and admonitions for their mutual submission to each other. I will then try to make some applications of this teaching to practical difficulties being experienced in the Body of Christ today.

1. Jesus is the model for free and positive submission and obedience.

When the boy Jesus was found in the Temple by his parents after a three-day search, he gently chided them for not knowing that they would find Him there; but afterward, “He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them” (Luke 2:51). Even this early, He established the

practice of being in voluntary submission in a circumstance where He had more understanding than those who had temporary authority over Him. I wonder if Jesus didn’t find it increasingly incongruent to be under the governance of Mary and Joseph; though they had been chosen for their dedication to God, they were subject to human limitations which must have been apparent to Jesus as He grew up.

WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST, PEOPLE RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER ACCORDING TO THE MODEL OF THEIR MASTER AND KING, AND NOT ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD.

His obedience in this situation must have been preparation for the profound obedience to His Father in Heaven which, the writer of Hebrews tells us (Heb. 5:7-10), He had to learn through suffering, even though He was the Son of God. Toward the end of His ministry on earth, Jesus had occasion to demonstrate graphically to His disciples the lesson of achieving greatness through being a servant. Having already remonstrated with them about their competing for superior position in God’s Kingdom (see Matt. 20:24-28), He gave an object lesson at the Last Supper to underline His previous statement that “whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve . . .” (Matt. 20:27-28). John tells us that *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God*

and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. . . . When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:3-5, 12-17)

The contrast between what Jesus was (the almighty Son of God) and what He voluntarily became (a servant to sinful mankind) is strikingly spotlighted in the prelude to the footwashing scene, which states that He was acutely aware "that the Father had put all things under his power." The fleshly mind finds it hard to understand and accept Jesus's lesson here: that voluntary submission to others in servanthood is not an act of weakness, but of strength; not a surrendering of individual worth, but

an affirmation of it in a more profound way than any human exercise of power and prerogative could establish.

The final act of submission

Jesus's final act of submission came in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed to be delivered from the bitter cup that He was about to drink, but ended with the words, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). As Paul says in Philippians, though Jesus was one with God, He

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6-11)

Thus Jesus's voluntary submission to the will of the Father, and His humble and obedient servanthood, led to the fulfillment of God's plans for Him and for mankind: that Jesus Christ be exalted and honored as God's anointed King and the savior of the world. Even at the end of time and the eternal consummation of all

things, Jesus will "be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). He is both our model of positive servanthood and obedience, and the One who enables those who follow His example to experience the fulfillment of God's purposes in their lives—to be exalted in God's way, not in the way of the world.

In the person of Jesus, then, is the foundation of biblical teaching on submission, and from this foundation flow several other theoretical principles of Body life, the first of which I would state as follows:

2. All submission to others must be a direct outgrowth of, and subordinate to, our submission to the Lord. (Rom. 13:1-7; I Cor. 10:28-33; I Pet. 2:13-16, 18-19).

When we submit to civil authorities, it is not only out of fear of punishment, but "also because of conscience" (Rom. 13:5). As Peter puts it, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (I Pet. 2:13). When Paul urged the Corinthian believers not to eat meat offered to idols out of deference to the tender consciences of others, it was not that he was allowing himself to be coerced by the "tender conscience" people ("... why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?"—I Cor. 10:29), but that he chose to uphold an underlying spiritual principle: "... whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it

all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, . . . even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (I Cor. 10:31-33). The same principle is made explicit in Ephesians: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:21-22).

Children are to obey their parents "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1), and servants are to obey their masters "wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men" (Eph. 6:7). In the most explicit admonition to submit to spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:17), the rationale is that as these men "watch over you," they "must give an account" to the Lord of us all for the discharge of their responsibilities, and



submission to them is to the “advantage” of the whole Body.

In many of the exhortations to submission in the New Testament, the people being submitted to were not necessarily worthy of the submission, and that was not the reason for the requirement; rather, the principle was to be voluntarily subject to them as a part of our submission to the Lord. Who of us in our right mind would contend that we are worthy of being submitted to? Since only God is worthy of our ultimate submission, we run the risk of a kind of idolatry if submission to another is not a direct consequence of our being submitted to Him. In that context, an act of submission becomes a manifestation of trust in God, and not, primarily, in the human being to whom secondary submission is being rendered. Accordingly, those being submitted to are given instructions focusing on their need of humility, sensitivity, and a special awareness of the awesome responsibility connected with the position that God has allowed them to occupy. The next principle shifts the spotlight from the submitters to the people exercising authority.

3. New Testament admonitions to submit are balanced by instructions to those being submitted to, urging them to act with tenderness, compassion, and loving care toward those under their authority, seeking always to build them up and affirm their value, and never to exercise authority in a



demeaning or self-exalting way. In other words, in the Body of Christ, those in authority (husbands, elders, parents, slave owners or employers) are to bend over backwards to encourage development of all the best potential in those they have responsibility for. (Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-4:1; I Tim. 6:17-19; James 5:1-6; I Pet 3:7-8; 5:1-3)

The most detailed and emphatic teaching of this sort is to husbands, coming after an unambiguous admonition to wives to submit to their husbands (stated twice—Eph. 5:22, 24). Taken out of context, this admonition is often seen as a liability for wives and a license for husbands; it is neither, as the subsequent instructions to husbands make clear:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and

blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

(Eph. 5:25-28)

As a preacher friend of mine tells couples he counsels, for a husband to be the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church means that, like Christ, the husband is to be first in line for the cross; or as C. S. Lewis refers to it in his marvelous little book, *The Four Loves* (in the chapter entitled “Eros”), if the husband wears a crown, it is a crown of thorns. Far from authorizing a man to demand and enforce the submission of his wife, Paul instructs the husband to give himself up for his wife as did Christ for the church, even going so far as to cover her faults, if necessary, in order to present her “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27). That doesn’t sound like a license to be lord and master in any worldly sense of the exercise of power.

In I Peter 3:7 is another balancing command to husbands, following six verses on wifely submission beginning, “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands”; the writer continues, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” The next verse, moreover,

is another admonition to mutual submission: “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers [‘and sisters’ is surely meant as well], be compassionate and humble” (I Pet. 3:8). The rationale here is that the husband is to be especially considerate of his wife because of her relative weakness, and respectful of her because she is a “partner” and is as much an heir of God’s kingdom as he is. Describing wives as “the weaker partner” does not imply any kind of inferiority of intelligence or character or ability, for in these areas women often prove to be superior to their husbands, and even to men in general; but rather it refers to physical, emotional, and social vulnerability. It would seem evident that the ease with which women have been mistreated by men throughout history indicates that they are in many ways inherently at a disadvantage in dealing with men, from having less physical strength to their function in the structure of the family, in which their special responsibility for the bearing and nurturing of children creates the need of special support in these activities. In our own society, the large number of single mothers shows the susceptibility of women to being abandoned. So the obligation of the husband as set forth in this passage is to be especially aware of how his physical, emotional, and social advantage needs to be used for his wife’s benefit and support, so that both of them can experience shared and unhindered prayers as fellow-heirs of the Kingdom of God (3:7).

Other New Testament teachings on power

I have concentrated on the counter-balanced divine instructions to wives and husbands both because they are the most detailed of such instructions and because there is so much misunderstanding and controversy surrounding them. But the principle of mutual submission is reinforced in the New Testament teaching regarding other relationships in which power might be (and often is) exercised in an ungodly way. Immediately following the husband-wife passage in Ephesians are two such teachings (which are also set forth in the same pattern in Col. 3:18-4:1):

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise — "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good they do,

whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Eph. 6:1-9)

Even though children are unequivocally instructed to obey their parents, and elsewhere parents are given the charge to require such obedience, there is nevertheless the caution to fathers (as those ultimately responsible for enforcing parental authority) not to "exasperate" their children, but, "instead," to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Training and instruction are processes that require patience and understanding, and whatever firmness may be required to keep children at the task of learning, they are always to be encouraged and valued in such a way as to engender and build on the hope that they are both capable of learning and worth the trouble of teaching. Any heavy-handed use of authority that would demean them or deprive them of hope (or embitter and discourage them, as in Col. 3:21) is prohibited. In the slave-master relationship, masters are to eschew the impersonal and devaluing treatment ("Do not threaten them") that might be tolerated or even expected in the worldly view of things, but that has no place in the Body of Christ, since slave and master stand as equals before God. Abuse of the poor by the rich is scorchingly attacked in the book of James (2:5-7; 5:1-5), and,

in a more positive way, the rich are encouraged by Paul to act responsibly and generously with the wealth and power that God has given them (I Tim. 6:17-19). Even the duly appointed spiritual leaders of the Body of Christ are not to "lord it over" those in their charge, but are to be examples to the flock (I Pet. 5:2-3).

In view of the principles of freely given submission through the grace of God and mutual submission in love, we must conclude that a legalistic insistence on the submission of others is an attempt to enslave those whom God has set free, and that it has no place in the Body of Christ. The possibility of submitting again to a "yoke of slavery" from which we have been delivered is a subject that Paul addresses with a great deal of feeling, and that leads us to two related final principles flowing from the example of Jesus as obedient servant.

4. Submission according to the model of Christ is, spiritually speaking, a free and voluntary act, empowered and given meaning by the grace of God, and not by any principle of law. Christ set us free from the Law, and if we understand and accept the grace of God through Jesus that replaced the Law, all acts of humility, obedience, and submission will be expressions of spiritual freedom, whatever our exterior circumstances may be (Rom. 5:18-21; Rom. 6:12-19; Gal. 3:23-4:7; 5:16-25; James

4:7-10; I John 2:3-5).

Paul's teaching on grace continually stresses our deliverance from bondage to sin through the sacrifice of Christ and our freedom in the grace of God. In Romans 6 he says,

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

A LEGALISTIC INSISTANCE ON THE SUBMISSION OF OTHERS IS AN ATTEMPT TO ENSLAVE THOSE WHOM GOD HAS SET FREE, AND THAT IT HAS NO PLACE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

(Rom. 6:12-14)

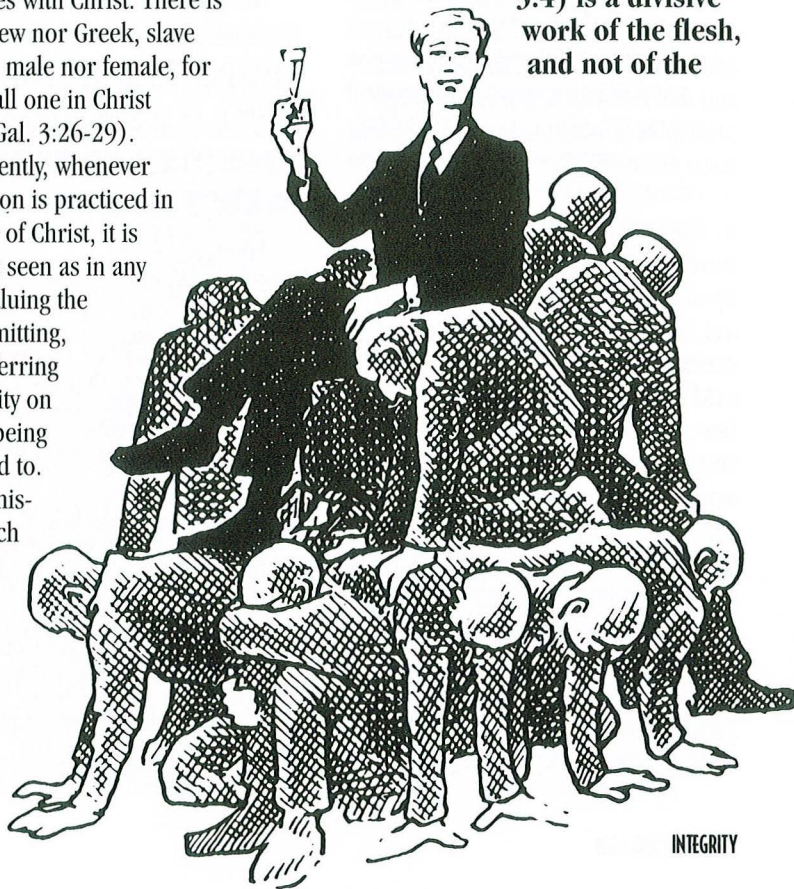
We are no longer subject to the rule of sin because we have been delivered from slavery to it. Even the perfect Law of God delivered through Moses has served its purpose of making evident our slavery to sin and pointing us to Christ, and it is now set aside (Gal. 3:23-25). And in the freedom of our new life, we can, by the grace of God, offer to Him ourselves and our bodies to be used "as instruments of righteousness," because we "have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). Walking in this new-found freedom of grace is

in another place described as living in and being led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25), which is God's new life within us, marking us as legitimate, free-born children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:13-17; Gal. 4:6-7).

It is significant that Paul chooses the context of these arguments affirming that we live under grace and not under law in which to make his most egalitarian statement about the relationship between those who are in Christ. Having been delivered from the authority and power of the Law, Paul says, "You are all sons [i.e., children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-29). Consequently, whenever submission is practiced in the Body of Christ, it is not to be seen as in any way devaluing the one submitting, nor conferring superiority on the one being submitted to. Any submission which is forced and not freely given seeks to devalue the

one submitting and compromises our deliverance from slavery to the Law. In a case of this sort, the submitter can act in free obedience to the will of God and experience the freedom of grace, while one who tries to enforce submission has stepped outside of grace by refusing to submit to God's instructions to those having power. It is those instructions that underlie the final principle springing from the servant-example of Jesus:

5. Any attempt within the Body of Christ to enforce submission from others (with the exception of parents controlling children—I Tim. 3:4) is a divisive work of the flesh, and not of the



Spirit, and is a denial of the freedom we have through God's grace. (Rom. 8:5-8; Rom. 16:17-19; II Cor. 11:4-9; Gal. 2:4-12; 4:8-11; 4:23-5:1; 5:24-26; Col. 2:20-23)

One kind of submission is not only forbidden in the the New Testament, but is characterized as a betrayal of the freedom Christ died to obtain for us. In presenting his allegory of the two wives who bore children to Abraham, Paul says, "Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman [Hagar], but of the free woman [Sarah]. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 4:31-5:1). The "yoke of slavery" in this instance took the form of insisting that those males who had accepted Christ had to be circumcised, thus tying them to the Law based on merit which was set aside by the death of Christ. Earlier in the letter, he spoke of the work of false teachers whose purpose was to spy on the "freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves." Paul is adamant in his resistance to this attempt, saying, "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (Gal. 2:4-5). When even Peter was carried away by the "circumcision group" (2:12), trying to "force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs" (2:14), Paul "opposed him to his face" (2:11) in order to defend the principle of grace as the source of salvation, and not law-keeping.

The Judaizing teachers who came in for such scathing words in the letter to the Galatians were challenging and seeking to replace both Paul's message and his authority, both of which, he makes clear, were given to him by God Himself (Gal. 1:8-12). The foundation of Paul's message, the "truth of the gospel," both as originally delivered to the Galatians and in his letter to them, is that one "is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16). The charge against the false teachers is not merely that they are voicing a differing opinion, but that they are attempting to use their influence to re-enslave people to the attainment of righteousness by their own efforts, instead of relying on God through faith in Christ. They are not people who have a real concern about brothers and sisters in Christ, but rather people whose objective is to exercise control over others through requiring circumcision; as Paul puts it, "they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh" (Gal. 6:13). In other words, they are the sort of people described in Romans 16 who "cause divisions and put obstacles in your way" (v. 17), and those in Titus who foment "foolish controversies and quarrels about the law" which "are unprofitable and useless." Such a person is to be warned once, "and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned" (Titus 2:9-11).

Motivation and attitude are everything here in evaluating the character of these disruptive teachers and assessing the danger that they pose. They were obviously more concerned with exercising power and coercing people than with following God's way of grace, humility, and

IN THE SAME WAY, IF A MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST TODAY SEEKS TO GAIN POWER OVER OTHERS . . . THAT PERSON IS A SOWER OF DISSENSION AND DISHARMONY, A DIVISIVE PERSON WHO IS "SELF-CONDEMNED."

service. In the same way, if a member of the Body of Christ today seeks to gain power over others by demanding a kind of submission which would be a regression to law-keeping and a renunciation of the freedom of grace that we all have in Christ, that person is a sower of dissension and disharmony, a divisive person who is "self-condemned." While one who refuses to submit to a divinely appointed authority may miss an opportunity for growth and cause the Body to have a weaker testimony to the world, the wielder of fleshly power in the Body who is able and willing to reject the freedom of God's grace inflicts even greater damage on both himself and the Body by demanding legalistic conformity from others for his own satisfaction and aggrandizement.

Summation

There is another principle that is complementary to those I have outlined. It is set forth in II Cor. 10-12, where

Paul is indulging in a rhetorical exercise with the Corinthians by "boasting" of his accomplishments in the flesh, to show that he is not inferior to the "super-apostles" (II Cor. 11:5) who are trying to subvert the Corinthians from the Gospel of true power, which is different from the power of the world. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (II Cor. 4:3-4). Here he is building on a point he made powerfully in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he said, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (I Cor. 1:25). As in Galatians, Paul remonstrates with the Corinthians for "put[ting] up with" a "different gospel from the one you accepted" (II Cor. 11:4), preached by the so-called "super-apostles," whom he characterizes as "false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ" (11:13). In the conclusion of his ironic "foolish boasting," he relates how, to keep him from becoming conceited . . . ,

there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

"When I am weak, then I am strong!" This principle is easily transmuted into "When I am submitted, I am exercising God's power;" "When I am a servant, I am free;" "When I am obedient, I am in a position to command."

Practical implications

What, then, are the practical implications of all of this for our life together within the Body of Christ?

(1) In the first place, we had better all get it right in regard to what power means within the Body. There can be no question about God's expectation that those in authority will encourage and enhance the ability of those in their charge to realize their full potential, perhaps even enabling them to achieve a fuller potential than they realize is possible. We are one in Christ, joint-heirs and brothers and sisters of Him and of each other, without regard to our earthly, circumstantial relationships. No exercise of authority by husband, elder, employer, or parent is to involve demeaning or devaluing those who, under God, submit to them; and with the exception of parents' responsibility to keep their children under control, in none of these situations is an individual in power authorized to demand submission from others. (It should be noted that elders may

sometimes have to exercise leadership in disciplining a wayward member, but in my opinion this should be done only in cases of disruptive behavior or bringing shame on the church, and never without consultation with other mature members of the Body, so that the disciplined member is the subject of congregational action, not just excommunication by the elders.) If the attitudes of mutual submission and putting others' welfare above our own governed every member of the Body, there would be no arguments about relative advantages enjoyed by or denied to anyone.

(2) But given our frailty and flaws in the flesh, disputes and accusations will arise, and those in authority will too often abuse their power and advantage. What are those for whom God has commanded submission to do? One form of this question was poignantly expressed to me recently by a dear sister in Christ: "How do I separate my own continual need for humbling and molding, obey Jesus' command to 'bless those who persecute,' but still stand up against what really, honestly seems to me to be sinful, destructive power structures in our church?" The first thing to be said is that submission doesn't mean not being able or willing to voice opposition to "sinful, destructive power structures" or to an individual's obsessive and inordinate use of power. If those involved in such behavior are not willing to listen to respectfully presented objections, then they, like the sowers of dissension, are "self-condemned" for their lack of



humility and of concern for those for whom they have been given responsibility. And speaking particularly to the distressingly frequent abuses of power by husbands and elders, they must remold themselves to fit the paradigm by which they actively cultivate the ability of their wives and the women of the congregation to contribute to family, community, and congregational life in such a way as to demonstrate and appreciate their value as co-workers in God's vineyard, not to humiliate them. Precisely what the effects of this paradigm are may differ between specific families and congregations, but what in all instances it must mean is that women are given equal honor with men; that whatever submission they offer is taken as the voluntary fruit of their relationship

with God, and not imposed upon them; and that any limits imposed upon their activity within the congregation be determined through communication and dialogue with them, not by edict from the leaders.

In this context, I must hasten to add that women should not put themselves or their children in jeopardy when a husband has proven to be abusive. When a husband so grossly perverts his power and his physical or social advantage over those who are weaker, those who are in danger are not obligated to be enablers of his abuse, and he must be curbed by the discipline and control of both civil and church authorities. As Paul used all legal means to avoid unjust treatment, so in such cases should contemporary women in free societies avail themselves of all legal means to deliver themselves and their children from physical abuse.

Preachers and elders who pressure wives to continue to live with their husbands under such circumstances are not reflecting the biblical principle of submission, but are making yet another legalistic application of it which demeans and injures the weak and brings reproach and shame on the church.

(3) The third point to be made here is that joint prayer is a marvelous leveler in the fellowship of the Body. It is very difficult for people to go on their knees together before God, sincerely submitting themselves anew to Him, and at the same time maintain the barriers to communication often

raised by perceived abuses of or challenges to power. In times of prayer like this, we have a tangible manifestation of our being "all one in Christ Jesus," where we are "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female"—that is, where all the distinctions of authority and submission are set aside as we come humbly before the Lord as equals in our experience (and need) of His grace.

I know of no better place to conclude this study than "on our knees together before God," and this is the prayer that I would leave with you:

Elton Higgs is an elder at the Trenton, MI, Church of Christ and a member of Integrity's Board of Directors.



VOICES

Forgiveness (Healing Your Soul)

Denise Germain

Eleven years ago I took over directing a pre-school at our church. I had three children. My oldest was 6 and in elementary school. The other two were ages 3 and 17 months. While pregnant with my third child I quit work and became a stay-at-home Mom. This was very difficult for me, being the project-oriented person I was. Housework was definitely not my thing and so I felt quite isolated. When the need arose for a new director I jumped in with both feet

Dear Father, enable us to think as Jesus thought, and thereby act as He acted: in humility, servanthood, obedience, and submission to the will of God. Help us also to know the power and strength of allowing these qualities to govern our lives; the freedom of grace that comes from trusting you for the outcome as we obey You; the sweetness of fellowship as You blend us together in the Body of Christ; and the certainty of our final redemption when all submission will be subsumed in our glorious eternal worship together before Your throne. In the Name of Jesus Christ, our King, amen. ✿

and, since I knew little about how things were run, I needed someone to help me. This is where one of my church sisters came in. She had been in this program for several years and offered her assistance readily, and I gratefully accepted. She had already been doing quite a bit of the administrative work and we seemed to fit like a hand in glove. After a couple of years, though, tension began to arise between us. We no longer saw eye-to-eye on a lot of things. After a while it seemed we were in conflict quite a bit

of the time. We became very competitive. Of course, I can only speak for myself, but while there were many issues involved, I believe my jealousy was at the top. She had a confidence I never had and I didn't like the way I doubted myself when she questioned my judgment. A strong desire for control and recognition surfaced. Eventually a strong resentment emerged, resulting in a severed relationship between us. This was perfectly okay with me. I had no intention of ever getting involved with her again. For the longest time I couldn't even bring myself to be in any class or involved in any ministry where she was present. I had no idea what effect this would have in my life. Over the years I became more and more withdrawn and out of touch. I was no longer involved in anything at church and was basically ineffective in the Kingdom of God (Satan really knows how to destroy us, doesn't he?)

God works

In time I began to change as I allowed God to work in my life. I got involved once more with church and ultimately with this sister. And once again we became good friends, which wasn't too difficult because we thoroughly enjoyed each other's company (most of the time). But it didn't take long before another conflict arose, and it was back to the drawing board. Where before I wanted nothing to do with her, this time I sincerely wanted to work things out. We talked out our differences but weren't any closer to reconciliation

than before. By this time we were thinking it was impossible for us to stay in relationship and we agreed that it was probably best to keep our acquaintance strictly casual.

The belly of the whale

In the meantime, the Lord had been speaking to my heart about another ministry which would require quite a bit of my time. Ignoring the Spirit's prompting, I decided it was just too much for me and decided not to get involved. All the while not knowing that the Lord was speaking to this sister about the same ministry. When I found out that she had been voted in I felt it was a tremendous blow to my ego. I was angry and jealous even though it was I who said "No." I don't think God was trying to teach me something (except maybe humility) by allowing her to get in and not I. I don't think her getting in had anything to do with what He was trying to teach me. He called me and I said no. It was my choice. However, I spent that summer in what I've since recognized as "the belly of the whale," only I didn't realize it at the time. Things I normally got done with ease were like pulling teeth. I did not understand what was happening. I had all kinds of plans and I barely got anything accomplished. It was very frustrating, to say the least.

In September the kids went back to school and this ministry began in full swing. Someone dropped out and an opening became available. I immediately resisted the prompting of God once again with good reasons (or so I

thought, actually it was fear). Fortunately for me, He opened my eyes and everything became clear to me. Like Jonah, I refused to obey God and was suffering the consequences of my disobedience. I was miserable but didn't know why until God revealed all this to me.

God sometimes causes us to be miserable to get our attention. Jill Briscoe wrote a book called *Out of the Storm and Into God's Arms*. In it she writes,

God causes us to have these struggles to teach us—to help us grow. He oftentimes sends us out in the boat to meet the storm head on and then comes walking to us on the water. The problem sometimes is that we don't recognize him because of our fear. What we have to keep in mind is that fear distorts and what we think is a ghost is really Jesus coming to help us, but we don't recognize him because we are too afraid to take an honest look which requires humility. Peter was willing to let go of his pride and trust Jesus. Somehow we think that admitting our faults causes others to look at us as weak, but Paul said in Corinthians, "When I am weak then I am strong." I believe this verse can be applied here—when we confess our faults to one another, we gain strength not only from each other, but also from the Lord because we've made it public that we cannot handle this on

our own and we need help.

As I began to surrender, I suddenly realized I had a major problem. The rivalry with my sister stood in the way of my being effective in this ministry. How could I possibly work side by side with her when our relationship was in a shambles? I knew in my heart that somehow I would have to straighten things out—for the last eight months I had harbored resentment in my heart every time I saw her, especially when she succeeded at something. I knew that this was damaging.

A walking testimony

Dr. Smedes writes in his book *The Art of Forgiveness*, ". . . we hurt no one but ourselves when we hold grudges and refuse to forgive." I was a walking testimony of this as I looked back on the past 11 years. I allowed my pride to get in the way and, as a result, I suffered isolation, guilt, peace, ineffectiveness, and pain. Resentment and revengeful feelings are very ugly. Their negative effects squeeze the joy right out of you.

Once I realized this, I immediately called my friend on the phone and told her everything. I acknowledged how wrong it was to harbor those feelings, but seemed at a loss to set things straight until now. It felt wonderful to finally get that off my chest. To her credit, she welcomed me back with open arms and modeled true unconditional love (I am very grateful to her for showing me that love). Once I accepted God's will and made the first step towards obedience,

I was amazed at how quickly the ugly feelings vanished. It was like they were never there.

I hung up the phone and headed into work. When I started the van, a song came on. (God has done this for me lots of times in the past. I'll be struggling with something—needing confirmation—and He speaks to me through songs. I know it's Him because it's always the same way—I start my vehicle and the song comes on exactly at that time, exactly at the spot He wants me to hear. He uses the words of the song to speak to me and I sense this in my spirit. Kind of like the two disciples who, after walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:32) and realizing that they had been talking with Jesus, say to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us along the way?" There is a feeling of excitement when we connect with the Spirit. Our spirits bears witness with his Spirit that he is in our midst. Romans 8:16).

Anyway, the song went . . . "With arms wide open, now everything has changed, welcome to this place, I'll show you everything—with arms wide open." As I listened to the song, I indeed felt God's presence. I could just imagine Him holding His arms wide open while he communicated his love to me—His way of telling me that I'm headed in the right direction—that I'm not alone. He's always been right there beside me and now things are going to be different. I had righted the wrong and He was giving me not only His approval, but also more

importantly, His promise that he would walk with me every step of the way.

The next step

Once I acknowledged my disobedience and restored my relationship with my sister, I faced my fear of getting involved in the ministry I shared with you earlier. This was an elected position and, sad to say, I was not elected. Of course I prayed that the Lord's will be done and so was somewhat at peace about the whole thing although quite disappointed. But that's not the end of the story.

What I didn't know was the Lord had other plans for me. I left for Mackinaw Island for a women's retreat the very next day. I wondered how I would enjoy myself after such a letdown and didn't want to go in that state of mind. I called my minister and talked with him about this and other issues that were causing me distress. As we talked, I realized the process I had just gone through stirred up things in my marriage I had been running from that needed to be faced. I always knew these things were there, but my style was to avoid confrontation at all costs. Fear played a pretty big role in what I did and didn't do. Now everything was coming to a head and it was time for me to come clean. I somehow knew this trip was going to be a pivotal point for me and it certainly was. When I arrived at the conference, I sensed the presence of the Lord immediately. To my amazement, tears began to flow—which was another confirmation that I received, because whenever God is moving

within me, the tears fall like rain. That may not be so for some, but for me it is, because I never cry and in fact have wondered at times if there was something wrong with me. So when I cry and I sense the presence of the Lord, I realize that He is speaking to me.

Filled with purpose

His presence was very powerful at this conference and the Lord began revealing things to me. While there I totally surrendered my life to Him and prayed diligently for courage and boldness. He filled me with such purpose that coming back home to discuss these issues with my husband was easier than I expected. I was afraid to express my true feelings to my husband for fear of being rejected or that my life would change in ways I wouldn't like. I also recognize that pride played a part in all this as well, since it took a certain amount of humility to admit these feelings to my husband. I lacked confidence in my feelings and was afraid that I would be wrong and hurt him. I had a lot of self-doubt. God replaced that doubt with confidence—not in myself, but in Him. Because I had experienced Him so strongly, I had the confidence that He was leading me.

I can honestly admit I did not like this learning experience, but looking back and knowing what I know now, I am extremely happy God granted me the opportunity to go through the

struggle. I would never be where I'm at today without it.

What did I learn from all this?

Well, I learned how important it is to spend time in prayer and in the word. It's there that we commune with Him and create an attitude of prayer where He meets with us and we sense His presence. When this takes place on a daily basis, He can begin to reveal his will to us. I also learned how powerful and destructive pride is, how very hard it is to humble ourselves. It is much easier to hold a grudge and justify it with all kinds of examples pertaining to the one we are holding a grudge against (especially when we have others that will agree with us). I learned once more about God's grace and mercy—about a God who has infinite patience with us. But most importantly, I learned that forgiveness is worth the agony of humbling yourself and taking chances because it frees your soul to do what you were placed on this earth to do: serve and glorify your creator!

I suppose I will always find life difficult at times and confusing at others. And even though there are moments when I'm groping in the dark, I know God is near. Any moment now He will throw on the light switch. As He illuminates my path, I feel His warmth on my shoulders and I hear Him say, "my child, this is the way—walk ye in it." ❀

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Reconciliation and Healing in the Local Congregation

Roger A. Rhodes

I find it odd that some Christians seem to have the concept that the beliefs and practices of the Church of Christ were completely consistent—up until the last 40 years or so. The church today is clearly in a state of constant internal challenge of its beliefs and practices; however, this is nothing new. Churches in the first century struggled with similar challenges. Certainly there are consistencies to be found. But there is, and will continue to be, considerable variety of thought and practice within the church.

Reexamination of our beliefs and practices is healthy for a people who claim to be biblically-oriented instead of culturally-driven. Unfortunately, we live in an era of mistrust. Seldom does anyone receive the benefit of the doubt. To be forthright, the problem is not just cultural. Leaders and members alike are not involved with one another in healthy ways. We are failing to develop and build trust among the entire body of Christ. Therefore, how and why we reexamine our beliefs and practices can quickly become suspect to both dissenters and proponents. This can result in hard feelings and accusations that sidetrack the life of a congregation.

There are numerous contributors to tensions and divisions within a congregation. Some of the more common causes of conflict over issues are: lack of vision, unrealistic expectations, selfishness, people feeling devalued, people feeling powerless over the affairs of church life, poor Bible knowledge, immediate condemnation for those who challenge the perceived “main stream” doctrine of the church, poor communication skills, and inadequate interpersonal skills.

Matthew 5:21-26 and Matthew 18:15-17 are the passages most Christians use to resolve tensions between people or groups. I would hope that everything included in this article can be considered simply an expounding upon these specific passages as well as other areas of Scripture that guide God’s people in person-to-person and group-to-group interaction.

Aspects of congregational life

Before examining various aspects of reconciliation and healing in a congregation, it is important to note a few aspects of congregational life.

1. Avoiding conflict is not one of the goals of a congregation. The goal is to provide an environment where people

feel safe during conflict and know healthy ways to encounter conflict.

2. My Dad’s “10/10/80 rule for church leaders.” Before I began “full-time ministry,” my Dad told me this rule. It has held true in most situations. In any given congregation, there are 10% of people that think of you as if you are almost God. There is very little you can do to change their minds. If you spend most of your time around them, you will get a false sense of reality regarding yourself. 10% of the people think of you as Satan incarnate. There is very little you can do to change their mind. If you spend most of your time trying to please them, all you end up doing is failing at your role in the church. Love them, act responsibly toward them, but don’t let them set the agenda for the church. The 80% left recognize you as a human being. They will pretty much make a decision about you by your “fruit.” Spending most of your efforts with and toward them will help you in your work and in your own personal growth.

3. It is a sad fact that reconciliation is not always possible. You can only move yourself toward others. They have to make their own move toward you. Sometimes the event is so far removed that those involved are already re-invested in other people and places. They may have already forgiven, healed, and moved on with their lives. Or they may no longer see the need to resolve the hurts and distance of the past. In long-term conflict, people die before reconcilia-

tion can occur. Forgiveness and healing are still necessary and possible for those still alive. However, it obviously prevents the joy of reconciliation. Also, if reconciliation can result in danger to others, healing may take place without full reconciliation.

4. Healing sometimes will take time alone with God and non-involved others before the hurt parties can get back together. It is important to note that time, in and of itself, does not heal all wounds. However, time spent appropriately is sometimes necessary before matters can be resolved.

5. The real enemy is Satan. People are complex creatures and the Devil takes advantage of that complexity to battle against God and His people. Past unresolved experiences, unanswered issues of the past, personality, inappropriate communication skills, and inadequate coping skills are opportunities that the Deceiver uses to attack people within a congregational context.

6. Reconciliation and healing will probably require a trained person from outside of the congregation if:

- A. The conflict includes the whole church or significantly affects the whole church.
- B. The level of conflict among individuals develops into groups at a tug-of-war with each other.

Decreasing the level of conflict

Lately, quite a few conflicts are over reexamination of doctrines and potential changes in church structure and worship. There are a few actions

that church leaders can take to decrease the level of conflict in a congregation.

1. Discuss, *ahead of time*:
 - A. What you are planning on studying and why.
 - B. What result the leaders are expecting from the outcome of the study.
 - C. What you are not attempting to accomplish by the study.
2. Use class room and private discussions for controversial topics- NOT the pulpit.
 - A. One-way conversation is unfair.
 - B. Allow people the opportunity to be heard.
 - C. Allow the church at large to provide questions and answers to concerns.
3. Remember to include both the official and unofficial leaders of the church in dialogue.
4. Provide a congregational environment that is perceived as safe for people to disagree or think differently from others.
5. Recognize the degree of impact that each specific change, or lack of change, will have on the church. Then plan accordingly.
6. Be patient. Plan very carefully how long it will take for the church to complete any change. Double that time, then add more time. The final amount is probably fairly close. If it happens sooner, count it as an extra blessing.
7. Anticipate that even those who want change may be uncomfortable with it for a while.
8. Spend lots of time with your

members. Time spent serving others is immensely valuable. However, it is of similar value to simply be friends with the rest of the body. Benefit of the doubt comes through experience and relationship. Before challenging the church, serve and be friends with the church.

9. Ask yourself, "what difference does it make? Is the reexamination or change worth the potential tension?"
10. Equip the leadership with conflict management skills, listening skills, and change theory before moving the church in any direction.

Once conflict has begun

There are helpful actions that leaders can take once tensions develop to lessen the degree of conflict.

1. Honor everyone involved.
2. Stay focused on the problem. Personalities can misdirect our attention.
3. Discover everyone involved in the tension. There may be people behind the scenes. There may also be people involuntarily involved or affected by the strife.
4. Discern what is at stake for everyone. What is it about the situation, subject, etc. that makes each person willing to expend the energy of conflict?
5. Ensure an environment that everyone involved recognizes as safe and open to each point of view.
6. Provide an opportunity for everyone to speak their mind and respond to others' thoughts.
7. Speak privately with those too

intimidated to speak publically. Be careful to not let them be anonymous players and speakers in the situation.

8. Once the closest agreement is found, focus on forgiveness.
9. Begin relationship building between the differing individuals and groups.

- A. Acknowledge differences while emphasizing similarities in preferences, beliefs, etc. in which most agree.

- B. Utilize Christian social occasions outside of church.
- C. Seek opportunities for service projects that include members within both groups.

11. If the conflict lasts more than a few weeks or is very heated, meet privately with individuals for prayer focusing on:

- A. The persons' self-acknowledged part in the strife.
 - B. Thanking God for specific good aspects of the opposing individuals.
 - C. Request for help to resolve the conflict in a way that reveals the merciful and loving nature of God.
12. Throughout the year, intersperse positive sermons and Bible studies emphasizing mercy, forgiveness, unity and diversity of the body, and love for believers and enemies.

Don't forget the vision

What do leaders do with the rest of the church during tensions among some members? Keep a positive vision of church unity versus division. Peer pressure and family-oriented feelings and thoughts can go a long way toward inhibiting escalating of

tensions. As one saying goes, "without fuel a fire dies."

It is also important to keep on track with the congregation's life and direction. When a church forgets its purpose and loses its vision, Satan is quick to step in and distract us.

THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION IN CONFLICT IS THAT THE PRIMARY MOTIVATION BEHIND TENSION WITHIN A CONGREGATION IS ALMOST ALWAYS POWER.

Periodically, publicly honor various people for the work Jesus accomplishes through them. Mention people in each tension group when possible. People tend to want to live up to the expectations of others. However, it is essential to also include people not involved in the controversy. Be careful to not let this be a manipulative tool. Honestly seek the good in people.

Pray constantly

The most important activity leaders and members alike can do to ensure a peaceful, vibrant and healthy congregation is to pray constantly. Pray for forgiveness, strength, and direction of every person in the congregation. If you have pictures of every member, kneel before them and ask God's blessings as you bring each name before our Heavenly Father. If you have a directory, do the same with it.

What's really happening

Since I am a preacher, I will get on my soap box and end with these thoughts. The reality of the situation in conflict is that the primary motiva-



Nag, Nag, Nag

Laquita M. Higgs

Rachel, quit playing and start eating.” I had already said that several times, and I was getting quite impatient. Suddenly, I heard the sound of my own voice, and it was not endearing. I was nagging, and it was time to re-evaluate my approach. Just that week I had read a quotation from Susan Yates (*And Then I Had Kids*, p. 141), “Laughter can cover a multitude of mistakes, can ease the pain of failure, and can cut through a tense moment in our relationship with others. . . . Humor can bring perspective back into a situation that has gotten far too serious.” With that in mind, I tried a little humor with Rachel, and it worked. She started eating, and I discovered that laughter is far more fun than nagging.

We parents need constantly to be evaluating our parental methods, as it is far too easy, especially for us mothers, to fall into the trap of nagging. I came across an article on nagging in *Christian Home and School* (January/February 2000) by Ida Rose Heckard with the engaging title, “Stop Nagging Your Kids (They’re not Listening Anyway).” I found it quite helpful, so here’s a summary: As a school psychologist, Heckard was baffled by her inability to help

mothers, including herself, to stop nagging. After studying the issue, she came up with the following suggestions:

1. Require first-time compliance. If we don’t expect children to obey immediately, then we are training them to wait until we nag them, which in turn trains us to nag. Heckard suggests that parents explain to children that they are expected to obey the first time they are told to do something, and if they do not obey within a few seconds, then help them complete the task or impose a consequence, but do not keep telling them over and over to do it. Make it also clear that routine tasks, such as making the bed, are to be done without a reminder.

2. Go on a word diet. Just like adults, children filter out what they don’t want to hear, and if the sound of your nagging voice is heard too often, it will just become background noise. If children don’t seem to be listening, they probably aren’t. Heckard suggests that you establish routines and consequences that can be enforced without words. For example, for her son who often left his belongings strewn about the house, she has a Saturday box. When he leaves something out, she quietly picks it up

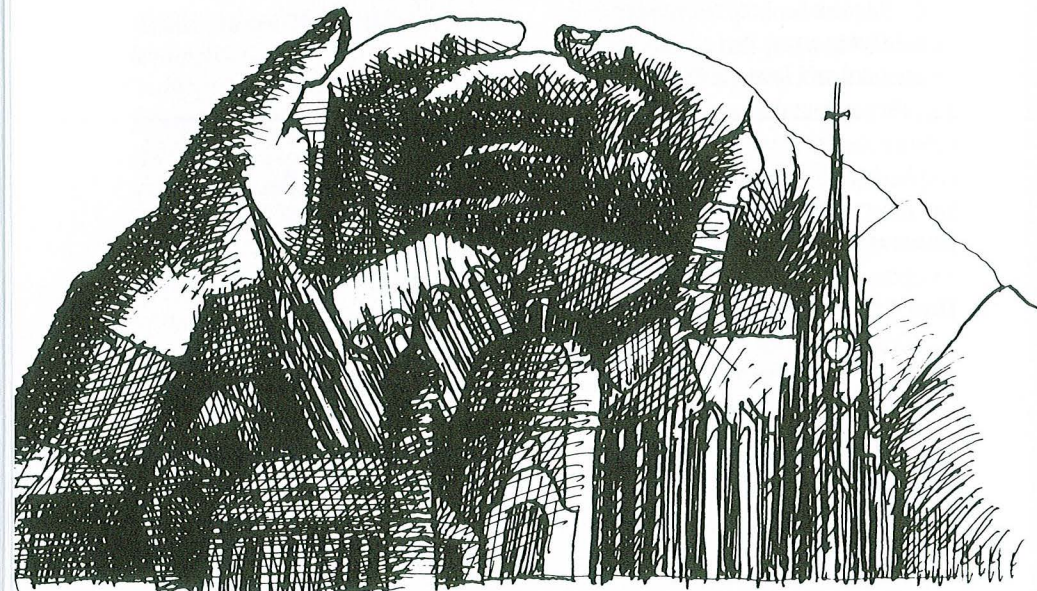
tion behind tension within a congregation is almost always power: who’s got it and wants to keep it, or who doesn’t have it but wants it. If it isn’t power, then it’s probably people trying to rescue the church from “heresy.” I would remind everyone that the head of the church is Jesus. He alone retains the power to appropriately move a church forward or manage the church in its current state. And He doesn’t need any help rescuing His body either. He is fully capable of taking care of His body by Himself. Does He utilize people? Yes. But He’s looking for a people who are attuned to his leading.

Managing and leading a church is 3 parts prayer, 2 parts study of Scrip-

ture, and 1 part physical activity. Too often, sin creeps up on us and we take God’s place in His church. We have a task of love that includes obedience. But that task is couched in relationship and submission to God. Though we may run the bases, it is Jesus at bat, the Spirit coaching, and the Father who is the Umpire.

Finally, if we will humble ourselves before God and others, be courageous in our love for others, and act with consideration toward those with differing views, not even the Devil can hold back the impact that God’s people will have on this earth. May God bless you in your declaration of His Gospel. ❁

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and puts it into the box, and the item stays there until the next Saturday. At first, the box was very full by Saturday, but her son has now learned to pick up his things so the box is usually empty.

3. Be consistent in enforcing the routines and expectations. Experts say that it takes 21 days to form a new habit.

4. Praise and reward successes.

5. Track your own progress. Record the number of times that you revert to nagging—it may shock you. That will help you to repent and be less angry with your children.

6. Walk in grace. Take your weakness to the Lord and seek his help in being the kind of parent that he called you to be.

Which is best for your child?

If we have a choice, what kind of schooling should we select for our children? After asking that question in a recent issue of *Integrity*, we received some thoughtful answers. Julius Hovan, minister of the Gallatin, Tennessee, Church of Christ, and father of four children, relates that his family has experience in both a Christian school and a public school. He writes, “In our case the difference was clearly in favor of the benefits of the Christian school.” He notes the importance of a child’s being grounded in Biblical principles in those formative years. Of course, as Hovan realizes, “the Christian school will by no means keep them from learning the ways of the world,” but

“hopefully to a much lesser degree.”

It was a financial sacrifice for the Hovans, but “it was well worth it.” Diane and Marty Quigley, who work in rural Guatemala with the Wycliffe organization, home school 8-year-old Joe and 6-year-old Miriam, which they say is the “the only option available to us that will meet our goals for our two kids.” Diane writes, “As for twig-bending, home schooling allows us the time and creates the environment to do this in a way we couldn’t if our kids were in an institutional setting. . . . Character development is a high priority with us. . . . If I send them outside the home for school, then there can be competing systems of dealing with character issues. . . . Moral development . . . takes awhile to develop. Until [then] I plan to keep my kids at home where we can make it a major focus.” Diane especially enjoys being with the children “during their most creative and productive hours of the day. I love to see them learn.” The Quigleys have carefully chosen a Christian home schooling curriculum that has worked well for other missionaries and for families in the U.S., and they report that the parents are learning a lot, too!

Sharyn Berry, who has three children in the Lincoln Park, Michigan, public schools, believes that either of the above options shelters children too much, giving them “a false sense of what the ‘real world’ is all about . . . public schools teach our children how to cope in the real world in small increments . . . It is a wonderful ‘hands on’ way of teaching

my children how to ‘be in this world, but not of this world.’” Sharyn also believes that God uses her children to reach families who do not know the Lord. “My daughter, age 12, brings friends from school to church almost every week. This is a great opportunity to share Jesus.” Sharyn also notes that her children see a lot of divorce in the homes of their school friends, but she uses that as an “opportunity to reinforce the importance of finding a Christian mate.” If you are making the important decision about your child’s education, pray earnestly and investigate carefully, as it will certainly affect your child’s spiritual welfare.

It’s not all a wasteland

I don’t often recommend television programs, but “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” on the Public Broadcasting System is exceptional. He has been around long enough to be satirized by comics for his gentle ways, but the program has won every major award in television. It was a favorite of our first two daughters, as it is today for Rachel, twenty-five years later. An article in *Christianity Today* by Wendy Murray Zoba (“Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” March 6, 2000) explains the attraction. Fred Rogers, who is still producing 10 programs a year, disappointed his parents when he decided to go into TV, as they wanted him to be a minister, but he sees his work as a ministry to “broadcast grace throughout the land” (40). He does not introduce religious themes into his programs, but he prays every time he walks into his studio, “Let some word

that is heard be Yours” (45). He wants to awaken something basic in the hearts of children, to help them with the trials of life, to arouse a sense of mystery and beauty, and to teach them that they are of worth so that they can respect themselves and care about others. Rogers, noting that “life is deep and simple,” deplors the fact

“JUST AS THE TWIG IS BENT, SO THE TREE’S INCLINED.”

-ALEXANDER POPE

that “what our society gives us is shallow and complicated.” Television can be “degrading, reducing important human feelings to the status of caricature or trivia.” He laments the failure of the media to make goodness attractive: “We’re so caught up in glorifying the opposite. It is so unfair for parents to have to be so vigilant” (45-46). If your child isn’t watching “Mr. Rogers,” try it for a few days. It isn’t fast-paced or glitzy, but he certainly grows on you. Even hyperactive children, who will sit still for nothing else, have been known to be calmed by Mr. Rogers. He has a simple message that is worth hearing.

Two suggestions for children’s bibles

My Good Night Bible has been a favorite with five-year-old Rachel since she received it as a gift. In fact, she demands that we read from it every night before she goes to bed. That may very well be a tactic for

delaying bedtime, but we certainly don't object. Each of the 45 Bible stories is colorfully illustrated and is concluded with questions and a prayer, all organized by a firefly called Night Light. For parents, there are helpful suggestions about making that "snuggle up" time a special part of the nightly routine. For ages 3-6 (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1999, \$12.99). A number of Bibles are available for elementary school age children, but here's a suggestion from eleven-year-old Mark Finch, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who likes his Bible,



MEDITATION

Sunday Faces

Kevin Corbin

How often has it happened to you? Running late for worship, you exceed the speed limit, just a little, and snarl at your spouse and children as you head for worship. One last snap at the family, then you get out of the car, put on your Sunday church face, smiling at everyone and telling them you are fine. Or perhaps, you have been hurt by the actions of others in the congregation, and you are angry. You harbour hidden hurts, play churchy games and pretend all is well.

Ironically, the place where people should be able to be the most open to one another, the church, is the place where they are often the most closed.

the *International Children's Bible: New Century Version* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), which was translated from the original languages especially for children. Sentences are kept short and simple, footnotes provide explanations for more difficult terms, and a dictionary and maps are at the back. Colorful art panels help the reader visualize scenes. For ages 7-12.

Send your ideas and suggestions to us at 9 Adams Lane, Dearborn, MI 48120, or at <Ehiggs@umich.edu>. ❁

This façade keeps us from experiencing much of the joy that is ours in Christ, and keeps people away because their lives are not all together as ours seem to be.

How do we break these ingrained patterns of behaviour and learn to trust one another, to forgive and to carry each others' burdens? It can be a difficult process, because it involves the risk of sharing your pain with others and their possible rejection of you. It is often a time-consuming process to make the changes and requires discipline to stick with, but the results can transform lives, congregations and communities.

Bathe it in prayer

The process is one that needs to be bathed in prayer. I believe it is the Lord's desire for His body to be unified and for our witness to shine to others. In keeping with that desire pray for open hearts, forgiveness, and reconciliation (where needed) within the congregation. We often pray for healed physical bodies, but it is also appropriate to pray for emotional and spiritual healing.

Begin the process of change by examining your own heart. Confess to the Lord each time you have hidden that hurt, or not really listened to others. Ask Him to soften your heart toward others. In keeping with the instructions in Matthew 5:23-24, go to the person you have harmed and seek reconciliation. Confess your anger or hurt to the offending party, ask for their forgiveness. They may or may not respond in kind, but you are called to look after your own actions, not their responses.

Christianity involves more than a mindset of "everything is perfect now that I'm saved," it involves transparency as well. Other people are watching how we handle the stresses of our lives. It is often when they see Jesus at work in us that they are most attracted to Him.

There is a Scriptural mandate to share ourselves with others beyond the superficial vagaries of Sunday morning social chats: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2 NIV). In order to carry each other's burdens, we must know what those

burdens are. Often we must risk sharing our own burdens before others will allow us to know theirs.

The process of change involves a few people committed to sharing the task on Sunday morning. When asked "How are you?" these people need to answer truthfully. When we ask that question of others we need to learn to watch and hear beyond the "Fine, thanks" and gently probe for the truth. As we do that, we need to take the time to listen.

IN ORDER TO CARRY EACH OTHER'S BURDENS, WE MUST KNOW WHAT THOSE BURDENS ARE.

Watch for a person's non-verbal cues; often they will reveal things that words alone do not. When Sally says she is fine but stands there wringing her hands, perhaps she is not so fine after all. A gentle "Really?" or words to that effect can often bring out a torrent of feelings. Be prepared to listen; few things can be more harmful than having someone spill their darkest secret only to hear you say, "That's nice," as you walk away.

Listen actively.

Some simple suggestions to help you do that:

- Validate the other person's feelings and their right to an opinion. There is no such thing as a bad feeling, they just *are*. A person can have unhealthy responses to feelings, but the feelings and opinions they hold are their right. You don't have to agree with them, but they do need

to be acknowledged.

- Listen to what they are saying. If you are busy formulating a response while they are still speaking, you are not listening.
- Thank them for caring enough to share their perspective.
- Seek wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit before entering into potentially contentious conversations.
- Recognize that on many issues there is room for a diversity of opinion. Some very few exceptions apply, e.g., the role of Jesus in our salvation, the truth of Scripture.
- Offer to pray with them, right then and there.
- Ask open-ended questions to explore the issue. Open-ended questions are those that need more than a yes or no answer. "How does that make you feel?"; "What about the sermon bothered you?"
- Reflect back to them what they have said to you. "It really hurt you when I _____?"

I have heard statistics claiming that up to 95% of all men have no one in their lives with whom they can share their true feelings and secrets. The number for women is less, but as our lives continue to get busier, the percentage of women in this situation is increasing drastically. People are desperate to share with others, to have

someone to talk with. This is often even more true in congregations in difficulty, as many Christians have the mistaken belief that sharing their struggles somehow makes them less spiritual.

Support can come from the pulpit as well. The pastor needs to be transparent, as well as the members. If the pastor has faced struggles, he needs to be open in sharing them. That can be a hard step to take, as members often expect church leaders to be perfect. Start with sharing the small struggles and over time build trust and compassion. Preach on the necessity of sharing ourselves and then model the behaviour to the congregation.

Modeling of appropriate behaviour by key leaders in the congregation, whether in official leadership roles or not is crucial. Even many Christians have grown up not knowing how to share or forgive. They may be familiar with the terminology but may never have seen it in action.

Provide that listening ear on a Sunday morning, open yourself up to a little risk. It can do wonders.

All relationships involve some level of emotional risk, but if that risk results in our growth as Christians or draws others to know Him, it is worth the price. Growing towards openness and forgiveness is a process that will take time, but it is time well spent. ❀

Kevin Corbin is a Canadian who came to know Jesus while in his thirties. He writes in a variety of genres for both Christian and non-Christian media. His work has been featured in a variety of local, regional, national, and international magazines and newspapers.

Kevin writes a daily online devotional column entitled, "Gleanings from the Word." To access Gleanings, visit <<http://www.themestream.com/authors/605597.html>>.



COMMUNION MEDITATION

Elton Higgs

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal. . . . Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst' (John 6:27, 35). In partaking of this bread, we reaffirm our commitment to the true Bread of Life, rather than to the bread which perishes. Our labors for the daily bread which sustains our physical bodies are set aside, and we allow ourselves to be drawn into the realm of eternal satisfaction with Jesus. The repeated supplying and partaking of our daily bread is necessary as a means to an end, which is learning to eat and drink of God Himself, so that we may be completely filled and satisfied. Jesus is making this point in John 6, when He contrasts the temporal manna in the wilderness, miraculous though it was, with the true bread—Jesus Himself—which sustains spiritual life, not merely physical life.

However, in our present form, we need both the bread of earth and the Bread of Heaven. The bread of earth prolongs our days on earth long enough for God's purposes for us here

to be fulfilled; by the grace of God we are sustained so that we may be His instruments in the world. But the fulfillment of that instrumentality is accomplished only by our taking within us the nature of the perfectly obedient Son of God. The Bread of Heaven sustains us as reborn beings who are delivered from the captivity of the first Adam into the freedom of the Second Adam, Jesus our Savior. Thus the Bread of Life nourishes the eternal part of us, not just our doomed bodies. But just as Jesus manifested the Divine Nature in a physical and perishable body, so we carry out His ministry by a temporary reflection of the Incarnation, merging the mortal and the immortal in an uneasy union to carry out God's purposes.

Jesus calls us to be like Himself in the world, experiencing the tension between the first and the second birth. He sustains both natures by His provision of bread, which is profoundly symbolized in its double sense in the Lord's Supper. He calls upon us to embrace and ingest it with thankfulness for both the physical and the spiritual sustenance which are embodied in what is at once the bread of earth and the Bread of Heaven. We walk thus, suspended with Him, until He calls us home to feast imperishably at His table. ❀



Searching, Forgiving, and Doing

Karen Hernandez

Hello! My name is Karen Y. Hernandez, and I want to share a little part of my life with you.

"I'll never be anyone special," I thought, since I was a victim of sexual abuse; but little did I know, God had something in store for me, and trying to figure that out was hectic.

The first thing that I had to do, in order for me to move on in my life, was to learn how to forgive all who had hurt me in one form or another. FORGIVENESS, Yes, Forgiveness! It's kind of a hard thing to do, and even if it meant taking baby steps, I knew if I didn't do it, I would remain in Satan's World of Depression, Fear, Anger, Jealousy, Low-Self Esteem and other Low Pit Torture.

Once I started remembering sermons on forgiveness and searching on my own, with God's help, the Healing process had started. This process started small, but it ended with a bang when I wrote a letter to all who had sexually abused me, and let them know that I had forgiven them for doing me wrong and that they needed to seek help, God's Help. I also gave God whatever burden I had, and I can really honestly say, "Praise God! I Am Free!"

Of course, Satan wasn't very happy; he had one of the perpetrators write a note back, and it said that he didn't

know what I was talking about and that what he was accused of had never happened. I was angry at first, but you know what? God gave me peace and He told me that He gave me the spirit of forgiveness, since I had truly asked and sought for it with a pure heart.

God opened doors

It was then that the Lord started opening new doors for my life—doors to restore my confidence. I attended a modeling school and began singing; I joined the drama team at school and danced. Once again, the Lord had opened new doors, and it was time to go to the next level. My husband's job required us to relocate, meaning we had to leave all of our families and this time really rely on God 100% for everything. We started attending a large church and I didn't want to become a pew warmer, so I started teaching Missionettes. It was there that the Lord opened my eyes and my heart to find out that I really enjoyed writing skits and doing small dances. The door for my singing abilities also opened once again, and to my surprise, it was overwhelming, and I knew it was all God's timing.

Timing, that was God's answer. Now, I'm doing many productions which I hope glorify God. I even sang and did a short skit about teen

pregnancies on T. V., but what really takes the cake is that I have had the opportunity to be in a movie with Carman. Yes, Carman, the gospel singer! The movie is called *Carman: The Champion*. I have had very little formal training in singing and acting, and I know it's only because of God that I was able to do what I did. He keeps inspiring me to do more for Him.

So how did it happen that I still felt I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing? And what was it that was holding me back? Maybe it was self-doubt, depression, pride, or maybe it was flesh wanting to be in the spotlight. But I don't want to do what flesh wants, I want what God wants!

Being in the state of mind that I was

in, I started surfing the internet and the Lord led me to *Integrity Magazine*, and it was to the editors that I wrote a few words on how I was feeling and asked if they had any answers for me. Praise God! Dr. Curtis D. McClane responded quickly, and his words were truly sent from God. He said, "It sounds like you are at a place in your life where, as one Christian writer and devotional master characterized it, you are fearing anonymity. In other words, we are thinking about life and whether or not we have achieved our dreams and really made a difference and an impact in the lives of others." WOW! This was so true and with this information and more, I was able to get back on track and start pursuing the future once again.

Seeing my past, I can see where God's hedge of protection was around me and still is, and He does have a purpose for me, and yes, you, too!

I pray that these words are anointed by God and that your spirit can feel His presence in them.

Thank you and God bless you! ❁



Karen Hernandez is a wife, mother of three girls, and grandmother of one. She attends the Church on the Rock in McAllen, TX, where she is involved in the drama ministry and the Pregnancy Testing Center. She says, "The number one reason why I do what I do is because of Jesus Christ, our God the Great Almighty. Praise God!" To which we reply, Amen, Karen!



MEDITATION IN PEN AND INK

Lora Price



“There is only one place we can put our guilt to find a true sense of forgiveness—on the back of the crucified Christ.”

-David Seamands,
Putting Away Childish Things

Lora Price is an artist and graphic designer from Berkley, MI. She and her husband work and worship with the Troy, MI, Church of Christ.



BOOK REVIEW

Is Forgiveness Possible?

by Joan Mueller Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998

Reviewed by Curtis McClane



“F”orgiveness is essential to Christian holiness.” This is how Joan Mueller begins her exploration of the dynamics and necessity of forgiveness in the life of the believer. What arrests the reader’s attention immediately is the word “essential.” Most of us have a fundamental view of forgiveness that assumes it is optional. We will forgive when the bad feelings go away. We will forgive when the other person asks for it. We will forgive only if some kind of restitution is offered. And, we will forgive as if it is a grudging favor to the offender.

Mueller challenges these secular views of forgiveness. Such views are so embedded into our way of living and how we think about people who have hurt us that some readers may find Mueller unsettling and unacceptable in a hurting and hurtful world. But she proceeds on two fronts simultaneously: she wants to undermine the egocentric foundation of popular views of forgiveness, and she desires to take us one step further in understanding and applying forgiveness than what pastoral theologians have

traditionally offered in their understanding of it. Two questions that haunt all of us constantly are: What is forgiveness? When do I have to offer it? These two questions birth a host of corollary questions: are Christian victims of abuse required to forgive non-Christians? Do we need to forgive those who repeatedly offend us when there is no sign of change on their part? Does forgiveness mean I have to stuff and deny the anger I feel toward the other person? Does forgiveness negate the need for confrontation with repeated offenses? When do I initiate the process of forgiveness and reconciliation? Does forgiveness mean that reconciliation must always take place? How do I define and desire such reconciliation? Where do I go for a better understanding and practice of forgiveness if I do not want secular society or pastoral psychology to be my only contexts of forgiveness models?

Biblical models

It is precisely at this point that Mueller enters the discussion and provides a biblical perspective. She offers biblical insights on forgiveness

from the Lucan tradition. Both Jesus and Stephen prayed seemingly impossible prayers of forgiveness for their persecutors while gasping for their last breath. How can such be possible? What promise do these two prayers hold for us today? In the Lucan prayers of forgiveness uttered by Jesus and Stephen there are three dynamics at work. The first dynamic sees forgiveness as a decision. The second dynamic sees Jesus and Stephen handing their spirits over in trust and confidence to God's care. And finally, the third dynamic observes that the Lucan petitionary prayer is the means through which the power of the Spirit inaugurates the forgiveness of sins as a salvific event.

Pastoral theology

Pastoral theology and counseling have offered helpful insights to the idea of forgiveness. Mueller chooses five well-known pastoral theologians/counselors and acknowledges each individual contribution and how each person attempts to answer the following questions: what is Christian forgiveness? How does the Christian forgive? What is the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation? The final chapter of this work provides an attempt to articulate a theology of Christian forgiveness that dialogues with pastoral theology but provides additional help and understanding in answering the questions in the previous paragraph.

This is not a light and fluffy devotional work on forgiveness. It is not intended for bedtime reading. And

it is most certainly not meant to be read once and put on the coffee table as entertainment for company. One other significant caveat: this is not a popular how-to-book. There are no steps to successful forgiving listed, nor are there any neat formulas packaged for us. If you are a "bottom-line" person who wants a quick fix because unforgiveness is wrecking your life, this material is not for you. You will have to go another aisle in the book stores.

Each chapter, page and paragraph provides protein and nutrition for the soul. It provides grist for the meal to be ground up in making bread for the hurting and searching spirit. It is designed to challenge assumptions. It is written to make the mind stretch. It is offered in hopes of providing an alternative paradigm of forgiveness so desperately needed in a sin-filled society and church.

At least for me, I have never read material on forgiveness that is so balanced, so biblical and at the same time so willing to recognize the contribution of others in this most painful area of the human predicament. Listen to some of the following quotes from this book:

"To decide to pray the prayer of forgiveness is to open up the possibility of conversion for both oneself and for one's adversary and thus to enable the spirited growth of the Church."

"The creative love of God is invited by the human into the region of chaos and darkness."

"Since repentance is always possible, the Christian is called to both

pray for the persecutor and excuse the persecutor on the grounds of ignorance."

"The prayer and excuse for the oppressor invite the persecutor out of the cold hate of violence into a community of love."

Conclusion

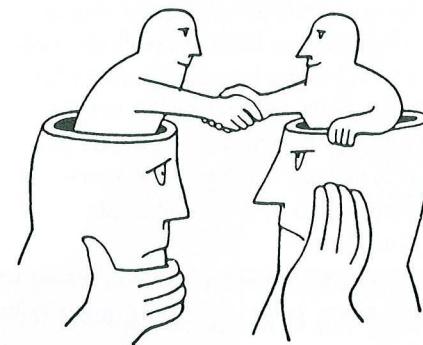
As preacher, spiritual care director and adjunct professor of spiritual formation, I am immediately compelled with the necessity of weaving this material into the warp and woof of my teaching on forgiveness. It would be nice if a class workbook had been published along with this text. But in my opinion, Mueller has provided cutting edge scholarship that permits us to re-think and re-evaluate our tendency to soft-soap and water down this most essential character of

Christian holiness.

Inscribed on the first page is: *Veni Sancte Spiritus.*

Come, Holy Spirit, Indeed!

Joan Mueller, Ph.D., teaches systematic theology at Creighton University. She also has authored a previous book, *Why Can't I Forgive You? A Christian Reflection* (Thomas More, 1996). ❁



Curtis McClane is the Editor-in-Chief of Integrity.

FROM THE BOARD

An Invitation

You know, dear reader, that you always have an open invitation to submit your writing to us. In fact, we encourage submissions from those outside the usual spectrum of writers: we love to hear from ministers, journalists, published authors, and professors, but we also relish publishing the work of

other Christians who, no matter what their background, have words on their heart which they feel led to put on paper. Over the last 30 years we have been blessed with so many writers from whom we have learned and with whom we have become friends. We feel that it's now time to broaden our invitation to you to participate in

Integrity's ministry. Here's what we've been thinking.

As we have worked together as a Board over the years, we have been trying to learn to rely more and more on the Holy Spirit's guidance as to what we should publish in this journal. As we grow in our faith, we can feel increasingly confident that He will provide the writers and the topics He wants to use to minister to our readers. He has always provided for *Integrity*, and, as we continue to learn to stretch our faith, we are looking forward to seeing what the Lord has in mind for this journal. With this in mind, we got together to pray and talk about possible topics which could be a blessing to our readers.

We invite you to pray with us about what *Integrity* should contain. Do you feel called to write? Do you know someone whom you believe has important things to say in *Integrity*?

Here is a list of ideas which we put together after spending time in prayer. This may or may not be our list of upcoming topics. It's just a starting point. Brainstorm with us about these topics, and, if you have something on your heart which you'd like to write for this journal, please contact us at the email or postal addresses on the inside front cover.

Our prayer is, and always has been, that God will use *Integrity* and that somehow, through this journal, He will bless you, dear reader. ✿

POSSIBLE ISSUE TOPICS, AND SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT EACH

Learning to Listen to People of Other Faiths

How God can use people who don't believe in Him to stretch our faith? How do we *really* respect those who believe differently than we do while witnessing to them about Jesus?

The Illusion of the Perfect Church

What lies behind this façade? How is this destructive to the church? How does the church enable us in maintaining façades? What can we do about this?

God as Our Father

How does a person without an earthly Father learn to see God as Father? What qualities does God the Father possess?

Really Ministering to the Poor

What is sacrificial giving? What's my responsibility? What's the church's responsibility?

Life with Jesus

How did Jesus handle interruptions? How do we learn to live a life that's out of our control, and in His control?

The Media and Christianity

How can we protect our kids? And ourselves? What exactly is *wrong* with T.V.?



COMING UP

Spring 2001

Christian Colleges

For future issue topics,
please see the article on page 51

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