

# Integrity

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## Integrity

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# Aspects of Christian Discipline

## PART ONE: EXCOMMUNICATION

### HOY LEDBETTER

In view of the dangers inherent in any situation wherein one segment of society seeks to control the relationships of another, we might expect that the practice of excommunication, although Biblical, should be subject to abuse as well as misunderstanding. By its neglect gross immorality may be allowed to flourish in the Christian community. Yet the threat of excommunication may work just as effectively, and as illegitimately, in silencing those who honorably question the distinctive features of factions and the decrees of ambitious pastors as the

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**excommunication.** An ecclesiastical censure whereby one is, for the time, cast out of the communion of the church.

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fear of being put out of the synagogue inhibited Jewish believers from confessing Christ. Even in cases where this form of reprimand is meetly motivated there may be considerable uncertainty about proper procedure.

Excommunication (often better known as "disfellowshipping") is only one aspect of Christian discipline, but it is the most severe form which we are authorized to apply. Because it is so severe, it should not be executed lightly or inadvisedly, but in the fear of God and in careful compliance with his instructions. My study of his instructions

has led to the following conclusions, which I want to state in order before examining the relevant scriptures.

(1) Although excommunication is clearly enjoined in the New Testament, several passages which are often thought to enforce it actually suggest a milder—and sometimes a considerably milder—form of avoidance.

(2) Excommunication is always intended to be remedial, never merely punitive; and this proposition requires more than mere lip service from us.

(3) The New Testament nowhere countenances clerical excommunication (that which is planned and effected by church leaders without the advice and consent of the other members of the body).

(4) When a minority within a church does not support the majority decision in a case of excommunication, the majority has no Biblical authority for consequent action against the minority.

(5) There is no scriptural warrant for one church excommunicating another.

(6) Excommunicative action is appropriate only in extreme cases of ethical and/or doctrinal error and when all other means of reclamation have been exhausted.

### A Personal Matter . . .

Now to the relevant passages. It is generally thought that Mt. 18:15-17 authorizes ecclesiastical excommunication, but a care-

ful study of this text will lead to a different conclusion. While it is true that one's efforts to win an offending brother may lead to the involvement of the whole Christian community, the final resolution indicated in Mt. 18 is strictly individual. Both the offense and the response are personal. The singular (in Greek; note the italics) personal pronouns in this passage are significant in its interpretation: "If *your* brother sins against *you* . . . If he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to *you* as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Whatever this discipline involves, it remains individual. It is individually decided upon and effected. I am appalled at such statements as this one from a recent article on this passage: "To 'refuse' to 'hear the church' is to disregard its pleas for penitence and restoration. Moreover, the church acts through its representatives—the elders." The Bible teaches nothing of the sort. The elders can no more "represent" the individual in this grave matter than they can "represent" him in eating the Lord's supper.

### Corinthian Corruption . . .

Another example of excommunication is in 1 Cor. 5. In this case the offender was grossly immoral ("living with his father's wife"). The Corinthians had not taken the offense seriously ("you are arrogant!"). The action taken was not decided by Paul alone, but was an effort of the whole church ("when you are assembled"). This meeting was "to deliver this man to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Paul had written them previously "not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even eat with such a one." And

now he urges them to "drive out the wicked person from among you."

We should note that the sins specified here are those of immorality and idolatry; there is no question about Christian doctrine, and this passage cannot be used to support action in cases of doctrinal aberration (except when idolatry is involved). It is plain that the excommunication was to be carried out by the Corinthians themselves; it was not the action of elders, or even of the apostle himself, but of the whole church assembled. The policy of making such decisions in elders' meetings was a later departure.

"Deliver this man to Satan" is evidently equivalent to "drive out that wicked person from you." Undoubtedly excommunication is denoted, but the language is bemusing. Whether this resulted in some physical affliction ("the destruction of the flesh") is uncertain, but it may be that something similar to, but less severe than, what happened to Ananias and Sapphira is contemplated. However that may be, the object was "that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In other words, the discipline was remedial, not merely punitive. There were, however, two sides to consider: "the one who did the wrong" and "the one who suffered the wrong" (cf. 2 Cor. 7:12). Unrestrained immorality could corrupt the whole church. "Do you not know that a little leaven ferments the whole lump of dough?"

Assuming that 2 Cor. 2:5-11 is an epilogue to the story of the immoral man, this passage provides some additional insights into excommunication. Verse 6 is particularly helpful: "For such a one this punishment by the majority is enough." "Majority" is the rendering preferred by RSV, NASV, Moffatt, Goodspeed, and others (cf. TEV: "most of you"). The Greek word is

*pleiōn* (comparative plural of *polus*), “most, majority” (cf. Ac. 19:32: “*most of them* did not know why they had come together”). The translation is significant in that it shows that the decision to excommunicate the immoral man was not unanimous: some did not agree with the decision of the majority. Furthermore, neither here nor anywhere else in the New Testament is any disciplinary action against this dissenting minority enjoined. This fact should discourage the modern practice of some *congregations* excommunicating other *congregations* because they do not assent to their disciplinary actions.

As we now know, the punishment inflicted by the majority was “enough,” and they were urged to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for the man, to keep Satan from gaining an advantage over them. The whole picture is one of brotherly love seeking to remove corrupting leaven from the body without the loss of a single member.

### Hymenaeus and Alexander . . .

The only other passage in which delivering to Satan is mentioned is 1 Tim. 1:19-20: “By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” It might at first be assumed that this text is at variance with my statement that the New Testament nowhere countenances clerical excommunication, since what Paul refers to here is apparently solitary (“I”), but that would be premature. There is, in the first place, no indication that Paul acted for others without their concurrence. And, in the second place, since all excommunication is essentially an individual matter, Paul may be speaking merely of his

own attitude toward Hymenaeus and Alexander, irrespective of what others might do. And even if we should grant (without any justification) that Paul could, on behalf of the whole church, place a ban on another Christian, this would hardly justify similar sanctions by subapostolic functionaries.

It is important that we determine as exactly as possible what Hymenaeus and Alexander had done. First, they had “rejected conscience.” Since the conscience tells us whether or not we are acting according to our knowledge of right and wrong, it is apparent that the actions of these men had been at variance with their faith, and their faith had consequently suffered shipwreck. “Rejecting” here is a very strong word, pointing to a positive repudiation of conscience rather than mere carelessness. As Donald Guthrie says, “it implies a violent and deliberate rejection.” So it is evident that their fault was not solely doctrinal, although we must not overlook the fact that they needed to “learn not to blaspheme.” If blasphemy “denotes the conscious and wicked rejection of the saving power and grace of God towards man” (Hermann Beyer, TDNT), then these men had excluded themselves from forgiveness by setting themselves against it, and the only place for such is the realm of Satan. But Paul’s chief concern in this discussion is to warn Timothy of the danger of neglecting conscience, of failing to act according to what one understands to be right.

There is no further mention of Alexander (perhaps he moved away, died, or repented), but we encounter Hymenaeus again in 2 Tim. 2:17-18, where Paul speaks of those whose “talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They

are upsetting the faith of some.” E.K. Simpson comments about them: “If heresy consist in the rejection of the kernel of Christianity, these teachers were on its verge; for their doctrine was leading to the overthrow of their disciples’ faith.” We should not underestimate the seriousness of their error, for, as William Hendriksen remarks, “it is immediately evident that Paul is not discussing a minor difference of opinion among men who basically think alike. On the contrary, he refers to capital error.”

The bodily resurrection is the keystone of Christianity; without it, as Paul says, “your faith is vain, and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). Since Christianity without the resurrection ceases to be a living faith, we are not surprised that these deviationists were upsetting the faith of some. But it should be noted, notwithstanding the earlier reference to Hymenaeus and Alexander being delivered to Satan, there is no mention of such action against Hymenaeus and Philetus in the present passage. This does not necessarily imply that excommunication was inappropriate in the latter instance, but it remains a fact that, for all we know, Philetus was never delivered to Satan.

### Doctrinal Deviation . . .

Another passage which must be considered in any discussion of excommunication is 2 Jn. 10-11: “If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work.” This imperative literally forbids saying “hello” or “good morning” (or any other greeting) to the person under consideration. Whether it is to be taken literally is a matter of interpretation (possibly John merely warns against allowing the man to

propagate his errors), but one thing is sure: the Christian must in no way receive or encourage the one who does not bring the doctrine of Christ. C.H. Dodd’s comment that “he is to be treated as excommunicate” is apt, but he goes astray when he says: “To ostracize people whose opinions we dislike is natural enough, but to find it recommended as a Christian duty is another matter.” (Dodd then dismisses this as an emergency regulation which makes bad law.)

But surely it is not John’s point that we should “ostracize people whose opinions we dislike.” The false teacher whom he does not wish the church to entertain is described in verse 7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” The seriousness of this conflict can hardly be compared with that of the controversies with which we are so familiar (the frequency of eating the Lord’s supper, instrumental music in worship, so-called Pentecostalism, and even the mode of baptism). The conflict was over whether or not Jesus had come in the flesh. Here again we encounter no minor difference of opinion among men who basically thought alike, but rather capital error.

John does not call the appropriate response of the brethren excommunication, but he does make it clear that no Christian should share the wicked work of the “deceiver” and “antichrist” who denies the incarnation. Those who would tolerate such teachers would be like the Thyatirans to whom the Lord said: “I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat foods sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to

repent of her immorality” (Rev. 2:20-21).

Now these are the passages—and *the only passages*—in the New Testament which appear to enjoin excommunication (this statement is made with full awareness of Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 2 Tim. 3:5; and Tit. 3:10; but, as I will later show, these texts do not refer to excommunication).

There is, however, one other passage which refers to disapproved excommunication: “I have written something to the church; but Diotrefes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and

also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church” (3 Jn. 9-10).

Unfortunately we see much of the Diotrefes type of excommunication today. There are still many brethren who would make a party out of the church, and who strengthen their factions by expelling from the fellowship all who will not support them and by prating with evil words against those who are courageous enough to protest. We need to be warned that such sectarians exist, but we must not allow their repugnant behavior to discourage us from exercising the responsibilities of Christian discipline and thus fulfilling the demands of genuine Christian love. *(To be continued)*

## Baptism in Its Place

F. L. LEMLEY

*Bonne Terre, Missouri*

Baptism certainly has a place in God’s scheme of redemption. It is a command of God, a declaration of one’s acceptance of Christ, a symbol of His death, burial and resurrection, and the act that puts a seal upon our faith. Jesus sent his disciples to teach all nations and to baptize those responding into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet in spite of all this, Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not

in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void” (1 Cor. 1:14-17).

Now it would appear that Paul may not have the same emphasis on baptism that we place upon it, in spite of all he had to say in Galatians, Romans and Colossians on the subject. It does seem that the great apostle may have been a bit careless with his speech here in taking the emphasis off baptism and placing it upon Christ and the cross—that is, if his view corresponds with ours.

Our emphasis is such that we *do* send out preachers and missionaries to see how many they can baptize! Our “powerful” preachers are known by the number they baptize; the

more baptisms the more powerful the man! Success in local work is measured by how many baptisms are counted! Our campaigns emphasize baptisms, and some of the trained campaigners begin bringing in the sheaves within an hour. Some subjects seem to “get baptized” just to get rid of these baptism supersalesmen and never darken the church door again.

### Spiritual Stillbirths . . .

Our attrition rate is exceedingly high. And why? Partly because we preach baptism as the ultimate step in a legal plan without grace or mercy! Rather we should preach baptism as a loving response to the gospel of grace. This would cut down on our number of spiritual stillbirths and abortions. Preaching the gospel is not a matter of selling baptism but a matter of sharing Christ. Faith and repentance are as much for the remission of sins as baptism, so we should not preach baptism as the *sine qua non* without grace or mercy. One’s inward faith and repentance may validate his imperfect effort at obeying the outward forms.

The correct and scriptural response, while important, is not the central thrust of the Good News. This is evidenced by Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 1:17. While the message is calculated to evoke a response, the response is not the message but a result. New Testament preachers delivered the message with such fervor that people cried out and asked, “What must we/I do?” When the question was asked, they were ready with the instructions; but with us it is different, for we inform people what to do before they ask. Paul’s purpose was not to see how many he could baptize, but our purpose evidently is just that. Therefore we baptize many before they are converted. We dare

not wait for the “fruits of repentance,” as did John the Baptist, for we fear that if we do not get them to the water their blood will be on our hands at the judgment.

There is no cause for such anxiety to get candidates into the baptistry. One has access to God’s grace through faith (Rom. 5:1-2), and only God can determine when a person’s faith and repentance are valid. Only God knows the hearts and will extend grace to those sincere hearts who are in the process of obeying. Baptism along with all other of God’s commands falls within the domain of grace. One’s obedience, manifested in outward forms, is dependent upon his ability and knowledge and therefore must be within the domain of grace, for knowledge and abilities differ from person to person. Jesus says, “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (Jn. 6:37). It is a mistake to classify honest, sincere seekers with the perverted and rebellious.

Let’s allow baptism to take its rightful place as a loving response to the gospel of grace, rather than make it the ultimate step in a legal plan without grace or mercy. Many who profess to believe in grace hold a legal stance on baptism, requiring 100% performance in order for one to enter the domain of grace. We are saved by “faith-obedience,” not by “faith *plus* obedience.” “Faith-obedience” allows for human defects, while “faith *plus* obedience” requires 100% performance or else. It is a mistake to view faith and obedience as two separate items, for they are inseparable. One may have a valid faith and be unable to perform perfectly as did Abraham. Ours is not a God of 100% or else! A “passing grade” does not depend upon performance but upon faith. A right standing with God results from faith (Rom. 4:3), not from performance! □

# Fear of Rejection, Damnation, and the Unknown

MARCUS B. DALE

*Little Rock, Arkansas*

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

—Luke 11:23

“Master, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him; for he that is not against you is for you.”

—Luke 9:49-50

One of the worst feelings a man can have is fear. This feeling is found in my heart at times when I think about fellowship. A war rages within me. One voice within me says to abandon the strict limits of fellowship that I have been taught to oblige and launch out into a happy Christian life of freedom from party bias. The other force within me pulls in the opposite direction. The latter force is mainly that of fear. It whispers softly to me, “What if salvation is not to be found outside the party you are in?” Again it says, “If you express your true feelings, you will be rejected by your brethren.” A fear of the unknown beckons me to be satisfied in an unsatisfactory condition.

Deep within me the former voice says in a soft rebuke, “Hypocrite! You lead these people to believe that you are with them and against all others. You lead them to believe that their party is the only true church.” I defend myself by saying, “But I do not

preach this strict position. I even express my true beliefs in private (sometimes).” Again the voice within me says, “Express yourself openly and if you suffer for the truth, be grateful for this opportunity.”

The war in my soul continues to rage, but one side is *beginning* to win. I now see the fear of the unknown as an obstacle the devil has put in my way, so that I might not express openly some opinions I have already been convinced of intellectually for some time. But I remember the words of Rudolf Bultmann who has written, “He who loses security shall find security.” In a similar line of thought, Jesus said, “Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it” (Lk. 9:24). The war within me will never end until I step out in bold faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone. After all, I ask myself, “Where does my salvation come from? Does the church save me? Does one branch of Christianity that originated in the early 1800’s in America make up the whole universal church? Do I have to hold to its unwritten doctrines which are interwoven in the culture of the frontier in which it flourished and in the democratic idea which protected it and influenced it?”

My critics will be quick to tell me that Christ only saves his body, the church (Eph. 5:23). To that I have no objection. What I do object to is defining the church in such a narrow, sectarian manner. The problem to-

day is the same as the problem in ancient times. Lk. 11:23 (quoted above) is a passage which could be—and was—used to support a sectarian view of the church. My example here will be Cyprian. All students of early church history know that his view of the church greatly advanced the type of theology which resulted in the Roman Catholic Church with its papacy and exclusivism. To my knowledge Cyprian never quotes Lk. 9:50, but he is quick to use Lk. 11:23. He uses this passage to show that the baptism of heretics and schismatics is not acceptable (*Epistle* 69.3; 75.1). In another place he quotes Lk. 11:23 and follows it with these remarks: “For if Christ is with us, but the heretics are not with us, certainly the heretics are in opposition to Christ; and if we gather with Christ, but the heretics do not gather with us, doubtless they scatter” (*Epistle* 74.14).

## The Necessary Balance . . .

I wonder if it ever occurred to Cyprian and many fine people today to balance Lk. 11:23 with Lk. 9:50. Lk. 11:23 shows that a man cannot be neutral about Jesus Christ. We are either for him or against him. To prevent the Cyprian type perversion of this concept, Jesus also gives us the teaching found in Lk. 9:50 (quoted above). The latter verse teaches that one may *not* be of the same group (body, party, etc.), *yet* still be *united* in belief and practice. Lk. 9:50 does not authorize division, but rather it condemns it. The man casting out demons was not the divisive one; Jesus’ disciples caused the division. They were making a division when there was not one to begin with.

We may well ask in connection with this, “Are we saved because we are in the church, or are we in the church because we are

saved?” The difference is not just a matter of wording or emphasis. The church does not save. Christ saves. Therefore, the question is not, “Are they with us?” (the question of the twelve in Lk. 9:50), but, “Are they with Christ?” (Lk. 11:23). There is much truth in what Norval Geldenhuys wrote in his commentary on this passage: “‘He that is not against us is for us’ is the test by which we should judge others; ‘he that is not for me is against me’ is the test by which we should judge ourselves.”

I am not concerned here with whether or not the baptisms of the people Cyprian wrote about were valid. I am saying that his method of argument set his party as the standard, not Christ and his scriptures. This eventually resulted in the Catholic exaltation of the church as being of equal authority with the Bible.

What about fellowship? Fear of something unknown, of rejection, and (formerly) of damnation stopped me from recognizing those outside of restoration circles (or more particularly the churches of Christ) as Christians. The fear of damnation is now gone, because I am convinced that there are more than two or three million Christians on earth. Besides, one division of the church tied up with American culture is not my savior. Therefore, the third fear is gone, but the first two remain in part. I hope and pray that I and others may worry less about security in the future, for “he who loses security shall find security.” John said, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love” (1 Jn. 4:18).

He drew a circle that shut me out—  
Rebel, heretic, thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win—  
We drew a circle that took him in.

## A First Century Parable Revisited . . .

Maybe some will view me as a wolf in sheep's clothing wandering dangerously around in the fold. If so, they will say, "Either change or get out. If you do not like the church, why do you not leave it?" (From their viewpoint, if their presuppositions were right, I would have to agree with them. But I write this article because I do love the church.) However, I view myself as a sheep that has never left one little corner of the fold. As I am about to wander out to visit the other sheep, my friends in the corner tell me not to go beyond the wall. The problem is that they are making a wall which I do not see. I see a large fold full of sheep. They see a small corner as the sheep-

fold, and all outside that corner are not "with them," so they assume they are not with Christ (like Cyprian). Some day the shepherd at the door of the fold will call, and all the sheep will follow him out. The sheep from the corner will be frantically asking all the others, "Why are you coming out? He is not calling you!" But even in the face of the loud objections, "the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (Jn. 10:5-6).

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:27-28). □*

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# An Open Letter to My Pastors

ALLEN HOLDEN, Jr.

*San Diego, California*

Dear Elders:

I just wanted to drop you a note and let you know that I am genuinely thankful to God for each one of you. Being under your oversight these past few years has been a real blessing to me, and I wanted to let you know in a public way that I have been touched and edified by this experience. I hope you don't mind my sharing these sentiments with other people; I believe that they might also be

helped by hearing about the good you are doing for me and for others.

There are a number of things that you gentlemen have done that have meant a lot to me. I've noticed that you aren't afraid to do things that are innovative and different, and I believe that the congregation is much the better because of this courage. You were the only ones in this area who were willing to sponsor a nursery school one day a week

for neighborhood children, an action that was not without criticism, and I am thankful that you did. I also think of the small discussion groups ("Partners in Preaching") and other imaginative small group experiences to which you gave your backing, and which have drawn the congregation closer together in a very tangible and beautiful way. You've been willing to try some different things in the worship, and have allowed song leaders to experiment with techniques to make our singing and praise more touching, which in other places would be considered too "different" even to consider. In fact, it was one of you who conducted an experiment in scripture reading and communion that left me uplifted and drawn back to the cross as I have seldom experienced before.

## More Evidence of Courage . . .

Actually, the list is too long to enumerate—the deacons who have been appointed who were deeply spiritual men but a little atypical in some ways, the unusual workshops you've sponsored that have involved much planning, foresight and prayer, and the countless individuals you have made to feel loved and important. I admire you for being willing to oversee the Young People's Lectureship this past year, despite the fact that it took a lot of time, money and guts (who knows what one of these hippy-radical-freaks is going to say in the pulpit?). And I'm sure that this is only a partial list—you've been doing visionary things for years before I came here, and are even now launching out on faith in areas that I am not aware of.

It's been my observation that you men aren't afraid to stand up and say what you feel, where in the same situation I might say nothing, in the interest of peace and tranquility. I am thinking of the time recently

when one of the area preachers was all upset about some of the professors at our Christian colleges, and was insisting that we *must* do something about them. Your calm and reasoned defense of these men, whom you had heard and knew to be God's people, was an inspiration to me.

Or there was the time when some members of the congregation were worried about the number of people who were reading some "questionable" brotherhood publications and were trying to force you to "take a stand" in this regard. I'm not sure I have the *love* to sit there patiently listening to each of them and trying hard to understand their feelings, or if I have the *strength* to refuse to be forced to take a position that is not fair or necessary, even if it meant that some of these brethren might leave the congregation, taking with them a sizeable amount of the church's financial support. And there are many other occasions that convince me that you are men of faith, whose courage and *agape* I admire.

It also means a lot to me that you have not been forcing your ideas and dreams on the congregation, but have made a special point to insure that the *desires* of the men and women of this community of faith determine what we do as a church. You are using committees extensively to get input and action on such diverse items as worship, mission work, the preacher's salary and the educational program. I don't see you trying to act as the all-wise dictator, making all the decisions for everybody else no matter *what* they think. You aren't afraid to hear from the church—not only through these committees, but through questionnaires and personal contact as well. This is *not* to say that you aren't leading the church, for in a very real sense you are exercising a most loving, concerned and visionary leadership. I see

you leading by virtue of the way you are living lives that are clearly God-fearing, Christ-like and Spirit-inspired. When you make a suggestion, give an admonition or announce a new work, I am *interested* in it because I know what kind of men you are, and following you is not a burden or a duty, but is a joy. In the true sense of the word, you are pastors—shepherds—and when a loving shepherd leads the way, we sheep are glad to follow, knowing that you have experience and wisdom, are looking out for our welfare, and are yourselves following the Great Shepherd.

Even though all of the above is important and true, the single thing for which I am most thankful is the way that you have accepted me, warts and all. I am only too aware of my own deficiencies and shortcomings, and I have a lot of rough edges that need sanding and a lot of blemishes that need to be covered. Because of my youth and idealism, I am impatient and frustrated, addicted to change and almost allergic to the *status quo*. But, in spite of all this, and so much more, you have welcomed me into this spiritual community, and have used me, challenged me, and involved me in meaningful service.

This doesn't mean that I agree with everything that you have said or done—I can't even agree with my wife on everything; how could I completely agree with five men who are so different from me (and from each other)? But this does mean that your accepting me, and my accepting you, is based on something deeper and more profound than being in complete agreement—we are

adopted by the same Father, trusting in the same Christ, and born of the same Spirit.

And, because we love each other, I feel free to come to you with my convictions and beliefs, even if they don't coincide with yours. When I have done this, and you have listened carefully and offered your feelings and views, we always understand each other much better. So if I can't take part in a certain activity or support a certain project, you know that it is a matter of conscience with me, for I have told you how I arrived at that understanding of scripture, and you are assured that my abstention is not an ornery show of disrespect. If anything, I respect you all the more, for I care enough about you to tell you exactly where I stand and just what I think God's will in this area is, and I am assured that you won't force me to do something that would violate my conscience and make me feel like I had sinned (Rom. 14). Not only can I be honest with you, but I am assured that you will tell *me* when you think something I am doing violates God's desires.

In closing, I'd like to tell you something that is very dear to me. Not many people know it, but one of my highest goals is for the Holy Spirit to some day appoint me an overseer in one of his assemblies, and, should that occur, I would count it an honor to have the freshness, courage, faith, love and vision that you men have.

May God continue to bless and fill each one of you.

With love,  
Allen Holden, Jr.

# Maybe

BETTY DENISON

Holly, Michigan

I'm not as dedicated as Jesus. I couldn't give my life. I don't love *all* the time. I'm not really as concerned about the afflictions around me as he was. I don't courageously strike out at the obvious wrongdoings as he did to the moneychangers and the hypocrites.

I'm not as dedicated as Paul. I might be tempted to change my ways instead of being punished by stoning, etc. Would I be dedicated even if the very God I was dedicated to refused to heal my infirmity? I am not in jail, or old—or cold—and I still am not singing praises and teaching everyone in sight the death, burial, resurrection, and love of Jesus.

I'm not as dedicated as Daniel. It doesn't take a *lion* to scare me. Sometimes a *line* will.

I'm not as dedicated as Abraham or Hana. Would I give my child—any of them—as a sacrifice or a lifelong worker?

I'm not as dedicated as John. I would not give my head!

But then maybe I am as dedicated as Mary and Martha. I can love Jesus (in Spirit form) and I can show hospitality to fleshly forms by sacrificing in domestic ways.

Maybe I can be as dedicated as Dorcas. I am willing and anxious to make garments for all sorts of people.

Maybe I can be as dedicated as Eunice and Lois. Maybe by teaching by the fireside, in the classroom and by life style, I can influence a courageous, obedient Timothy—or Dale.

Maybe I can be as dedicated as Andrew. Maybe I can lead my brother to Christ.

Maybe I can even be like Peter in some

ways. He faltered a lot! Yet he loved Jesus! He acted impulsively, lied in the face of danger, was prejudiced, two-faced, and went to sleep in the garden. Yet Jesus loved, rebuked and strengthened him.

I find it very difficult to relate today in specific ways to the dedicated heroes and heroines in the Bible. Those guys and gals had burning bushes, fire coming from nowhere, temples in the sky, white sheet with pigs on it, voices and angels.

I do believe in God's intervention in these times. God has worked miracles in my life. The things I consider as miracles would not convince doubting college students but they convince me. The miracles in my life were brought to pass by a change in the circumstances. Wasn't that just a coincidence, you ask? Maybe. Or the miracle came as a new insight into an old problem. I know many think the insight was there all the time, and I would have run across it sooner or later without God. Maybe.

Without the direct contact with God it is much more difficult to be faithful to him. I know that he is concerned about me and wants the very best of me and for me. I get guidelines from the Bible (even the absolutes have to be interpreted), exhortations from Christian brethren, and inspiration from prayer; yet the final decision is still mine. And there is seldom a talking donkey there to keep me on path, or a storm at sea with a big fish to swallow me when I go overboard.

I know many (and hear of multitudes) who have surrendered their lives to methodic dedication. It's not all bad, but it is not perfect either. All true dedication must be self-taught, self-imposed, and self-surrendered, and not just submission to high pressure leaders. That is not to say that dedication is selfish, but just to say it must be done by self.

My God is worthy of all the praise, adoration, and surrender I can release. He is not limited; I am! □

# Letters to the Editor

## More Comments on a Very Controversial Subject

I must have missed out on the previous issue, but the January 74 *Integrity* had some of the "windup" response to your homosexuality discussion. I don't know if you're aware of my new book, *Joy: A Homosexual's Search for Fulfillment*, [which is] the story of a miraculous transformation for a girl who asked for help, after having lived ten years in a lesbian marriage. It's the first book I know of, Christian or otherwise, that really points the way to a joyful transformation and personal fulfillment. As always, Jesus is the answer. It's not a put down—it's a compassionate, spiritual prescription, and best of all, a story of triumph!

Since you have kicked up quite a bit of dust over the issue, I thought you'd like to know that there is something positive and constructive and very, very hopeful on the subject. Praise the Lord!  
*Los Angeles, California* PAT BOONE

We feel it would be better not to have your magazine than to have our children read an article such as "A Homosexual's Viewpoint" in the January 1974 issue. That article, expressing the author's spirituality, yet also his desire to repeat a sinful act, could be damaging to young people who might be groping for answers themselves.  
*Southfield, Michigan* MRS. RALPH McQUEEN

Regarding the article by the homosexual [January, 1974], there are many errors in this man's thinking, and I prayerfully hope he will change by honestly considering the following.

He states that in having a sexual relationship with another certain man he "would not feel guilty or condemned by God." Yet God has told us that what we feel may be wrong: "Seek the Lord while he may be found . . . For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,

says the Lord" (Isa. 55:6, 8). And again: "Casting down reasonings and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Does this man's feelings agree with the following: "For this cause God gave them up unto passions of dishonor: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another" (Rom. 1:25-27)?

Provided this creative individual has the tremendous commitment to God that he claims, then he will surely put his thoughts and feelings "into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

*Darien, Connecticut*

BOB ISRAEL

## Personal to Marcus

Dear Marcus:

I suffered with you as I read your letter. I have been where you are. It seems the harder I tried, the more miserable I was. It would appear that if you weren't getting out of church what you feel you should, then applying yourself more *should* solve the problem. After all, you know the old saying: "You'll only get out of it what you put into it."

But let me tell you, Marcus, that's not the answer. I've tried that, too. Like Paul, I was as good a Jew (Christian) as any of them. I forsook not, I partook regularly, I volunteered, I gave of my means, etc. (For that matter, I still do, but it's different now.)

I think, Marcus, that God uses our futile religious exercises to make us tired and hungry, even desperate, in order to make us look for something better. He made my wife and me so hungry and

miserable that we did a most unusual thing for conscientious Church of Christ members: we went to a service in another church (other than Church of Christ).

There something most unusual happened. The breath of God touched us (that is, the Holy Spirit). It was completely supernatural. Some folks gathered around us, laid their hands on us, prayed; and suddenly everything was different. During the next few days, joy and love began welling up from deep within. Spontaneously. Beyond any effort or thought or prompting on our part.

We wanted to tell others about Jesus. We desired a broader range of fellowship.

Now, Marcus, I am not advocating going over to some "denominational" church and seeking an experience. I relate this only to say that this is the way God answered our prayer and the longing of our hearts for Him. We are still as regular in our attendance at the Church of Christ as ever, though now we sit in a glorious liberty that Jesus gives.

Our loyalty is to the precious Son of God and we are not bound up. As Paul says in Gal. 5, we are now free to love.

We have a new life in the Spirit of God which is real and ever fresh in our daily lives. Our circle of fellowship is broad. Our hearts are filled daily with the love of Jesus from the Holy Spirit. We see God in all our daily affairs and in all things in the world around us. We see Him doing miracles in others and in our own lives. We know Jesus as our healer and as our health. We know him as the provider of all our physical needs.

But most of all, we know Him moment by moment through the day in our hearts. It is this fellowship—that can come only through the working of the Holy Spirit from within our spirits—that is the really important thing. This is the source of our strength, the fountain of the love in our hearts, the spring of our joy and the peace that keeps our hearts as we trust in Jesus.

Marcus, I have considered giving you a studied scriptural outline to explain all this. But I was reminded that Jesus said that after the Holy Spirit came, we would receive power to be His witnesses. I am told that the best meaning of the word "witness" here is "eye witness." This is why I have chosen basically to just tell what has happened to me and my family—to tell what I have witnessed.

Our ideas, our doctrines are good, as far as they go. But they have to be put to the test of experi-

ence sooner or later. This is where you are hurting, Marcus.

After all the scripture and doctrine are studied and organized, you can't know what I'm talking about unless you come to God in simple faith and say, "God, I believe it. Now do it to me." We in child-like manner must go to our loving Father and ask for the gift of his Spirit so that we can know His Son in reality.

For we must be made spiritually alive even to have salvation (Jn. 3). And we can really know Jesus only through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:5-15). And we can have the Holy Spirit only by coming to God and asking (Lk. 11:13).

There's much, much more that can be said, Marcus. But it would still come to this conclusion: Am I ready to lay down my thing, to go to God in humility and even desperation, and believe Him to be real enough to actually touch me?

If you insist on keeping your religion only in your head, Marcus, you will remain miserable.

*Hughes Springs, Texas*

CARL WREN

## Concerning Communication

The Church of Christ is struggling through an identity crisis. It seeks to restore New Testament Christianity in the twentieth century, but has trouble agreeing on exactly what the first century church was all about. Some view it as a passive body of idealists, others as the radicals of the day. Somewhere, the two are one and therein is the true re-created church of the New Testament.

I appreciate your thought-provoking articles, not because they speak for me, but because they cause me to speak. They demand a response which the thinking Christian is so ready and wanton to give. As a professional communicator, I view *Integrity* as a channel of free expression. Our society, like our brotherhood, seeks to draw conclusions based on mutual understanding, i.e. meaningful communication involving the exchange of relevant information. Only when our brotherhood recognizes this need will unity prevail. So, then, let us be rational men willing to speak as well as listen. It is my prayer that many will take the time and put forth the effort to listen and respond to some ideas presented in *Integrity*.

*Columbus, Ohio*

PAUL KECKLEY