

Integrity

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BANNED IN NASHVILLE

HOY LEDBETTER

A former deacon and his wife, both commended by their elders "for their many years of faithful service to the Lord and His church," and he for holding the position of deacon "in a very fine way for a number of years," were withdrawn from by their home congregation in Nashville in July. Their excommunication was announced to the congregation by the elders in a statement which has been widely circulated and commended by one writer as "one of the finest declarations of this sort that I have ever seen." In view of the typically extravagant nature of such statements, I am inclined to agree with him. If it is judged among others of its kind, it is relatively moderate. But in the light of Biblical teaching on tolerance among brethren, it is sectarian.

The statement merits discussion for two reasons. First, since it is comparatively moderate, it may be regarded by many as a fine example of how to handle similar situations elsewhere. Second, the incident it reflects will probably occur in other places. It is not likely that my comments will help the situation in Nashville, but I do hope to make a contribution toward preventing such errors elsewhere.

The reason given for the elders' action against the couple was "a difference of conviction . . . regarding the teaching of the New Testament." More specifically, this difference is concerned with the activities of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the couple

and others. According to the elders, he claims to have experienced an "overwhelming" of the Spirit that left him a feeling of peace, contentment, good will, and love for God and man such as he had never known before . . . [and] that he has been given the ability to speak in tongues . . .

[She] claims to have seen, in a vision or in a dream, the Lord standing beside an altar . . . and they both claim to have seen or heard of (with a view to accepting them) such miracles as are recorded in the New Testament being performed today.

It is significant that they were not accused of creating division—a charge that is usually irresistible in such cases. The difference between them and their brethren is simply one of understanding of the Bible (and attitudes toward others growing out of that understanding). One question, therefore, was involved in the action: should people who hold to "Pentecostal" views be excommunicated?

Two Sources of Conflict . . .

The elders focused upon two conflicts between the couple "and the plain teaching of the New Testament." The first of these was:

When asked to explain the fact that these so-called miracles and tongues are performed and exercised by those who have never even obeyed the gospel of Christ, while faithful Christians do not experience them, they reply only that

they do not want to "judge" other religious people.

In my opinion this statement reflects the very heart of the conflict. The argument is: since special gifts of the Spirit are typically claimed by *those who have never even obeyed the gospel of Christ*, these cannot be legitimate experiences for the Christian. This is illogical reasoning because, in the first place, it ignores the fact that Spirit-inspired actions can be duplicated by unbelievers. When Aaron's rod became a serpent, the Egyptian magicians also turned their rods into serpents, but did that make Aaron any less a man of God?

In the second place, knowing what is meant by *those who have never even obeyed the gospel of Christ* is revealing. The term as used includes numerous baptized believers. As a matter of fact, it includes every person who does not hold to nearly all of the doctrinal peculiarities of the Nashville elders and who does not belong to a group acceptable to them on the basis of those peculiarities. That is, it includes every person except members of a particular kind of Church of Christ. Where is "the plain teaching of the New Testament" about that? The Bible condemns such sectarianism.

I emphasize the following passage because it is particularly important to this issue: "I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). This passage should make us slow to judge those who acknowledge the lordship of Jesus over their lives. No doubt it encourages a broader view of fellowship than that of the Nashville brethren. To possess the Spirit does not require perfection in every detail of living or complete accuracy in Christian doctrine. Anyone familiar with the context of

the above passage knows the Corinthians were defective on both counts.

While *faithful Christians do not experience them* shows an impossible situation. *Faithful Christians*, as they understand the term, can never possess spiritual gifts, for anyone who claims such possession is judged an unfaithful Christian. The excommunicated members were considered faithful Christians until they claimed special gifts. The difference between the faithful Christian and the unfaithful one in this case was nothing more than belief that gifts of the Spirit are available today. So, as those elders understand the term, no faithful Christian could ever experience them. This is arguing in a circle: no faithful Christian experiences them because anyone who experiences them is not a faithful Christian! (Significantly, it is not indicated that the couple held that one who does not possess a special gift is not a faithful Christian.)

Jude vs. Jude . . .

The other conflict the elders see between the couple's "present position and the plain teaching of the New Testament" is given in the following from their statement:

If it is pointed out that their understanding calls for a "progressive revelation" of God's will and that, if this understanding is correct, the Bible cannot be the final, complete, and all-sufficient revelation of God's will that the inspired writers claim (II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:3; Jude 3), they have no answer. They can only reply that they cannot deny the experience that they have had.

What this statement is supposed to say—and what the passages cited are claimed to prove—is that once the Bible was put together there could be no further revelation from God. But this argument claims far more for

the Bible than it claims for itself. No writer in the Bible ever claimed that he or his generation were to be the last to hear God speak directly. Of the three passages cited, Jude 3 is most frequently used to prove there is no “progressive revelation.” In it Jude appealed to his readers “to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” But if he means there can be no revelation after him, then he eliminates five important books from the canon—John’s gospel, his three epistles, and Revelation—unless we assume, against scholarly consensus, that these were written before Jude.

In fact, this kind of argument would eliminate even Jude. Note that Jude used the past tense: the faith “*was* (not *is being*) once for all delivered to the saints.” If *was* means that all later revelations were forbidden, then Jude himself could not have had a revelation from God! Obviously we must find another interpretation of what he said.

The Root of Scriptural Authority . . .

Since these two “conflicts” are based on such faulty reasoning, we should be tolerant of those who are not convinced by it. Additional charges against the couple were:

They no longer regard denominationalism as wrong, even though the New Testament condemns such division as sinful.

They believe they can worship God as acceptably in various denominational services as they can with what they call a “church of Christ” group.”

They no longer believe it wrong to use instrumental music in worship to God, even though its use is nowhere authorized in the New Testament and cannot therefore be by faith.

These positions and practices, among others, strike at the very root of Scriptural authority, substituting man-made practices for the expressed will of God.

How these matters “strike at the very root of Scriptural authority” is hard to see. I do not think it is true that these saints do not recognize that division is sinful. What they have done is abandon the denominationalism of a party which claims a monopoly on the people of God. Their “sin” is their recognition of and willingness to worship with Christians outside their own party. But the importance of the instrumental music question should not be minimized—not because our position is so vital, but because brethren in general hold it with such vigor. But that position is not based on “the expressed will of God.” The expressed will of God does not even mention it. Our position rather is based upon inferences and deductions which are so complicated that even most of us do not understand them. And it is to our shame that we have tried so hard to bind them on others.

The positions of the outcast saints do not “strike at the very root of Scriptural authority.” Rather they strike at the root of *our own* authority—the authority we claim to decide for everybody on earth whom he is to regard as a Christian, and the authority to bind our complicated inferences and deductions on all other believers.

The issue in Nashville is not evaluation of Pentecostalism. The issue is whether or not a Christian has the right to interpret the Bible for himself, to judge his own experiences in its light, and to live as a free man in Christ according to his own conscience.

Even if the elders are correct in their appraisal of Pentecostalism, in their view on instrumental music, or in their misgivings about “denominational services,” *they are wrong in forcing their views on others*. In so doing they are guilty of the very denominationalism they deplore.

Methods of Approach . . .

Two additional points remain to be made. One concerns the way doctrinal differences between brethren are handled. In Nashville the couple (and the congregation) were literally deluged with sermons and study sessions on the Holy Spirit, involving the elders, the local preacher, and a visiting preacher. This tends far more toward polarization than reconciliation of convictions. The targets of such concentrated attacks usually feel that something is being crammed down their throats and that they will be forced out unless they change. Human beings naturally react negatively to that sort of pressure. It allows no room for the spontaneity which is vital to all true religion.

The second point concerns the way in which excommunication is carried out. I do not know how many members agreed with the Nashville elders’ decision to withdraw from two of the saints, but elsewhere it has often been true that the elders reached that decision without involvement of the whole church. The Bible nowhere teaches that the elders have such a right. Rather it teaches that disciplinary actions are individual matters, and that no person can decide for the others what they should do. Elders and other leaders may be expected to take the lead when discipline is indicated, but they must not act in behalf of others without their consent.

The Nashville statement used five scriptures to point out the sobering responsibilities of elders: Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Th. 5:14; Rom. 16:17; Heb. 13:17. Only the first two of these refer to elders, and none of them enjoins disciplinary duties peculiar to elders. 1 Th. 5:14 exhorts *brethren* to “admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all”—

actions considerably less severe than those taken in Nashville. Rom. 16:17 appeals to *brethren* “to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them.” They are described in the following verse as people who “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites”—a description that would in no way apply to people who give the Holy Spirit more credit than some think he deserves. Heb. 13:17 asks the saints to “obey your leaders and submit to them.” These leaders can hardly be equivalent to the modern elders, since verse 7 applies the term to those who had planted the Christian community; but aside from that, the obedience enjoined cannot be one’s indiscriminate acceptance of doctrines he does not believe are true. Never in the New Testament is the Christian encouraged to allow another, leader or not, to dictate the terms of his faith. Elders who seek to bind their own interpretations of scripture upon other members of their congregations have taken a huge leap beyond the authority the Bible gives. The Bible no more recognizes episcopal infallibility than it does papal infallibility.

A man who has rendered “many years of faithful service to the Lord,” who has held the position of deacon “in a very fine way for a number of years,” who has had an experience, for which he gives the Holy Spirit credit, which has left him with a “love for God and man such as he had never known before,” who has in no way created dissension but rather refuses to judge those who differ with his understanding, and whose acceptance of Christ as his Lord cannot be questioned, deserves something better than excommunication. Let us pray that what happened in Nashville will never happen again. □

THE PRESS FOR DECISION

HERBERT BELLE

Cincinnati, Ohio

**“How often would I . . .
and you would not”**
—Matthew 23:37.

Jesus of Galilee, very much aware of the power structure's mounting antagonism to his attack upon the establishment of Judea, and having determined that the time of confrontation had come, set his face to go to Jerusalem, the citadel of those who were conspiring to rid their sphere of influence of his intense denunciation of their style of living. He entered through the city's gates and, to the accompanying acclaim of festive (though unknowing) crowds, proceeded forthwith to force a decision for or against his person as the one sent from God to release the human family from the sins which, like a cancer, were eroding the nerve center of the Creator's plan for his children's good.

That the words which Jesus spoke and the deeds he did while in the flesh were destined to bring his life to a tragic end is a matter of public record. Simply put, he died because he pressed for a decision wherever he went and of whomever he met. His speech was punctuated with unmistakable urgency. “He who is not with me is against me” (Mt. 12:30). He was the original “man in a hurry.” He never said, “Take your time, and at some future moment when you are ready tell me you have decided.” Always he said, “Choose you this day.”

But why the urgency to press for a decision? Jesus knew who it was who lined Jerusalem's streets that day, who placed the gar-

lands at his feet. It was a people (and think not that times have changed) whose lives were so absorbed by the enterprises of Main Street that they possessed little sensitivity to, or time for, the realities of the Truth of God who was in their midst. Save for a spiritual emptiness which haunted them, their lives were lived wholly on the material plane. The annual religious pilgrimage to the temple, validated by the dropping of a coin in the coffer, sufficed to keep them in good standing in case a child required the purification rite, or a daughter a marriage consummation, or a kinsman a proper funeral. Jesus brooked none of this. He brought this complacent temple trampling under judgment as being utterly two-faced, and the “men in the woollens and knits of the day” took offence, turned away, leaving the realm of the spiritual to the infirm, the weak and the old.

Some, of course, saw Jesus from a different perspective as he moved through the city's street. They were those who set the tone of the community's life by the manner in which they exercised (or was it *ignored*?) God's truth. Jesus had come with the audacity to challenge the power-block of Jerusalem, to do away with those long-established self-serving social, economic and political practices which tampered with the need for dignity in a human's life. His words fell upon deaf ears. It was then that he shot the verbal arrow which spelled his end: “Woe to you hypocrites! You cleanse the outside of the cup, but inside you are full of extortion and cupidity. Outwardly you ap-

pear righteous to your kinsmen, but within you are full of iniquity.”

When the “Who's Who” of Israel heard those words, they had enough! They had been accused of so diluting the faith of their fathers that it did no more than salve their conscience by soothing over their sins. Hence, they hastened to label Jesus a “disturber of the peace,” a blasphemer worthy of death. It was then that the city's streets resounded with the voice of doom. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not! Behold, your house is desolate and forsaken.” That was the inevitable result of the negative decision, and still it is so. But before we come to grips with that, we ought to view this press for decision in other areas of our Master's experience in order that we may fully understand its implications for us.

Those Haunting Questions . . .

It is to Jesus' credit that the press for decision which he imposed upon his contemporaries he experienced in his own person. From the moment he launched his work he felt the anguish of decision. The tempter suggested, “Turn these stones into bread; leap from the pinnacle of the temple; worship me; and I will give you the kingdom of the world.” His function as God's Son pivoted upon such queries as these challenges implied, and even after he found the answers the questions continued to haunt him (as all great questions do) time and time again.

When the opposition emerged, when the vast audience began to slip away, his friends urged him not to go to Jerusalem where a fatal clash was inevitable. “Stay in Galilee, Master, no one will touch you here.” The temptation to do just that was intense, but

he cast it off and determined to move post-haste to the final showdown. Once there, the question surfaced again, in Gethsemane, where, in grave agony, he found himself all but unwilling to go through with it, wondering if he were able for the awful tomorrow. Ah, the desperation of decision! “And being in anguish, his perspiration was as great drops of blood falling upon the ground.” When he had won the victory within himself, he wakened his drowsy companions and said, “Let us go.”

We should also note that Jesus pressed decision upon those who heard his abrupt command, “Follow me.” He never made it easy for them. None could claim that he lured him to his team by false promises of ease and glory. “Birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head”—with these words he greeted those who indicated a desire to enlist. How's that for an invitation to decide?

And once his tiny body of supporters had been collected, Jesus spelled out his purpose without stinting. He taught them the meaning of what he was doing. He kept repeating the ingredients of the Father's kingdom to them, always (no doubt) pressing for a decision. “Are you still with me?” He labored to nerve them for the final, bitter hours when it would seem as though every power upon earth was arrayed against him, and them. It must have been a heartrending experience for Jesus to discover that, following his arrest, they all deserted him, that only one was close enough to see him die.

We also need to recall that Jesus pressed for a decision on the part of the man who in a real sense presumed to dispense God to his kinsmen—even the high priest, Caiaphas. He went to the very top. He was not content to dispute with the lesser lights in the rural hamlets of the countryside. He moved to

the core of the resistance and there confronted the chief, as Nathan confronted David. "You are the man."

And (speaking in all reverence) Jesus seems to have sought a showdown with God himself while on the cross. How else can we interpret the plea, "My God, why have you left me?" It was distressing enough that the crowds, the religious elite, and even his friends decided against him. But to wonder about the stance of Him who had assigned him to do the work . . . that was more than a man could stand. Thank God, he got an answer for that one. Somehow we do feel the peace of his decision, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

The Headlong Plunge . . .

But why this press for decision with everyone everywhere which led to his death? In the first place, remember that Jesus was not simply a teacher, but a reformer. What he was talking about was more than a new idea to be considered. It was a new way of life to be lived, and that way demanded decision, action. Jesus did not get into deep water when he preached that his peers should forgive those who committed sins against them. The populace considered that to be sound doctrine. But when he actually had concourse with sinners—with the embezzler, with a woman of the streets, with a Gentile—when he flung open the door of God's care to them, that was going too far! Too far for others perhaps, but not for him. He was determined to change people's attitudes, to improve human relationships, and that required more than just standing upon the shores of life. It required plunging headlong into the waters of life.

Jesus believed in his work. He had chosen it to do, and he exercised his right to ask

others to do as he did. He did ask them—and *he does*. Let us not feel sorry for those who get hurt in the battles of the Lord. Let us rather save our tears for those who draw back at the point of decision, who say, "He's not for me," and proceed either to rail against him or politely ignore him.

In the second place, recollect that Jesus was one through whom the heart of God was thrust into human affairs. He had so little time to make known the vastness of the Father's love for all his children (no matter who or where they were); that love which needed only to be received in order that life be full and free; that love which—if practiced in the human setting by those who take it to themselves—would turn the world upside down, making of it the very place God intended it to be. That love was the good news which Jesus carried upon his bosom. He well knew his mission to be its proclamation in word and deed, and that he did; and he did it with an urgency which none of his peers could deny. But alas, the kingdoms of the world which Jesus faced had no stomach for such love. They had been refashioned upon foundations of greed, and upon their facade was inscribed their mode of life: "What you have I'll take, and what I have I'll keep." How different was that from the Father's intended realm of love in which the measure of a man's greatness was found in what he gave away and not in what he kept for himself!

It goes without saying that Jesus' demand for selflessness in the body politic of his time involved a radical critique and overhauling of life as it was, and with no holds barred. The man from God spelled it out for all to hear: "Choose me and live; deny me and die." It was to be all or nothing at all.

For a time we have considered that Jesus pressed for a decision. But I wonder: is that

the proper way to put it, at least as far as he was concerned? Did he press for a decision, or did others press decision upon him? Certainly he understood that something of immeasurable significance was happening through and to him. Eternity was knocking upon the doors of time. God was battering at the walls of men's conceit, affording them a way to live as sons of peace. But men who chose not God's way sought after Jesus and pressed upon him decision. Perhaps when Jesus heard the soldiers stalking across the valley to arrest him, he felt as Thomas Becket felt when he heard the footfalls of the approaching assassins: "Those feet have been pursuing me over the years; now they have come, and it is good."

Hence the cross becomes the blazing sign of what it means to decide in the affirmative, to say yes to Jesus. And as the song many of us learned in childhood puts it:

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me.*

It is regrettable when we flinch from deciding yes to the living kingdom of God in a world like ours. Do we not feel deep within us and all around us that something bigger than ourselves, something more lasting, is hammering away at the walls of our world as it is, hammering at every level of our lives, knocking our petty kingdoms of power, greed and pride into cocked hats? Do we not understand that to decide for love as we see it expressed in Jesus is incumbent upon us? Just as Jesus saw the gravest problem of his day to be not the Hebrew set against the Gentile, but rather God set against all the children of men, so can we not see the gravest problem of our day to be not East set against West or one race set against another race, but rather God set against us all?

He has all of us by the neck—of our prejudices, greeds and hatreds—and in no uncertain terms he speaks with an urgency like unto that which his own expressed: "Learn to live with each other or else." And that "or else" cracks loud with the doom which echoed through the ancient city's street: "O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken." I wish I knew the answer to this question. Do you and I possess the courage to say yes to Jesus at every level of our lives for the sake of the kingdom of God's love for which he lived and died? Just what do we want to be, do-nothings or do-somethings? Would we rather embrace the least offensive role as followers of Jesus, or would we rather embrace the high tradition of those who affirm, "We shall follow all the way"?

Ours is no time for calculated timidity to pass for Christian discipleship. There is never such a time. If we lack the courage now to decide for Jesus vis-a-vis the issues of these days, we will never find the courage to do it later. And again, if for whatever reason we fail, dare it be said, we shall hear again from Him in whose name these words are voiced: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would . . . but you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken."

Once to every man . . . comes the moment to decide . . . for the good or evil side. Some great cause God's new Messiah, offering each bloom or blight, and the choice goes by forever twixt the darkness and the light. . . .

New occasions teach new duties. . . . They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth . . . and . . . behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own. Amen. □

"JESUS IS LORD"

BOB WILLIAMS

Nacogdoches, Texas

The curious proclivity of members of churches of Christ for domestic, internecine warfare has come to be the subject of considerable internal curiosity. There has been an obvious malfunction when a unity movement such as that begun by Barton W. Stone and the Campbells results in divisiveness such as seen in contemporary churches of Christ. Explanations of the phenomenon are varied and generally partial, but genuinely interesting.

Regional differences were offered as an explanation of first division. Dr. David Edwin Harrell, an historian by profession, offered such an answer to the initial schism, and compared it to the divisions in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian communions. But that explanation cannot adequately explain subsequent quarrels.

Similarly, socio-economic differences have been cited as contributing to the divisiveness. As a generalization, usually in any given split the "liberal" party is better educated, more socially respectable and more affluent. But that generalization is valid only in broad statistical averages and may be contradicted by many local situations. As an overall explanation, it will hardly lend more than an interesting sidelight to the problem of division.

Some individuals insist that the problem of division is inherent in the common heritage of debate theology. Theirs is a compelling thesis. The early restorers were very

Lockean in methodology. They assumed that debate must inevitably lead to The Truth. Hindsight may reveal that these Lockean premises were overly optimistic, but contemporary argumentation rests to a large extent on now-forgotten conclusions and now-forgotten premises. Debate was and is the basic approach of Restoration Christians.

The debate method has at least two major flaws. (1) Debates offer high reward for polemical expertise, simplistic answers, and linguistic chicanery while penalizing exegetical excellence and intellectual honesty. (2) Debates appeal to the emotional nature of man and often stir up very carnal attitudes. ("Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your passions, which are constantly fighting within your bodies."—Jas. 4:1; cf. Gal. 5:20, 21.) For this reason the debate approach, whether oral or written, may easily be exploited by either the unscrupulous or those able to rationalize for themselves a ready excuse. A young preacher wanting a quick reputation may decry some common practice as an absolute evil which has "crept in unawares." The old preacher past his prime can always regain a following by elevating something to the status of an "issue" and defending it as part of "the faith once for all delivered." The same approach could be used to build a readership for a new paper or bolster a long-founded one now getting trite and stale. Obviously, this procedure con-

tinues. The mechanics of it are not too dissimilar to the peck-order in a chicken yard, but will continue so long as controversy is the road to status.

Naturally, the people and papers involved in contemporary hassles deny that any peck-order operates upon them. Each insists that it exists solely to call men to the authority of the Bible, and that unity would be instant if everyone else respected the scripture. In this way the *Christian Standard* can feel justified in judging and condemning *The Christian* because those dirty Disciples don't respect the scriptures. And the *Firm Foundation* can denounce the *Christian Standard* because those dirty Christian Church people don't respect the scriptures. And the *Gospel Guardian* can denounce the *Firm Foundation* because those dirty liberal churches of Christ don't respect the scriptures. The progression could be continued, but that is enough ludicrous denunciation to establish the point. Of course the Disciples condemn the Christians for legislating in matters of opinion; and the Christians condemn the cooperative Churches of Christ for their hang-up of legislating in matters of opinion; and the cooperative Churches of Christ condemn the non-cooperatives for their silly hang-up, while the noncooperatives condemn the non-Bible Class folk and so on *ad absurdum*. Great genius is not required to see that the authority argument is usually an egotistical

smoke screen to hide a rather ugly attitude.

Authority may indeed be the most crucial factor in Christian divisiveness. Truly there may be regional and cultural influences. Truly the rationalization for dividing may come from debate thinking and the motivation may come from selfish desire for status. But if indeed the proper authority were respected, the impulses and influences would be curbed.

Proper authority does not lie with editors, for they are as unheard of in the New Testament as church newspapers. Proper authority does not reside in evangelists or elders, for they are but men, and have often shown themselves to be utterly unspiritual. Proper authority lies with *Jesus* and with him alone (Mt. 28:18). All others are illegitimate interlopers, usurping powers from the rightful Lord.

Jesus' disciples are explicitly forbidden to lord it over one another or exercise authority over each other (Mt. 20:25-27; Mk. 10:42-44; Lk. 22:25, 26). The man who would condemn others by appealing

CAN'T Beth Hug

It's no use, God.
I can't serve here.
There's no one, I muse.
I have only fear.
Please let me leave.
Let me use
Those other talents.
Don't leave me here.
I can't do it!
Good, He answered.
Sometimes can't is
A doorway, the beginning
Of turning and looking,
Gazing at Can,
The I Am.
A Greater than Can't.
For you will serve.
You're not alone,
I'm in you—now.

to authority might do well to look to Jesus' teaching on judging (Mt. 7:1-3; Lk. 6:37; etc.) and at the apostles' repetition of Jesus' teaching (Rom. 2:1; 14:3-4, 10, 13; Col. 4:5; Jas. 3:13-4:12; etc.). Then rather than saying, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men," he can kneel with his brother and pray with us: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." □

THREE-RING PAPYRUS?

DAVID LOONEY

Fremont, California

The following manuscript was discovered in front of the Greyhound Bus Terminal in East St. Louis. It is believed by some to be dated no later than 100 A.D. and written by none other than St. Paul the Apostle. There is much dispute, though, as to whether it is to be included with the Holy Scriptures since many people say that any epistle written in ballpoint pen on three-ring notebook paper cannot be an authentic manuscript. In any event, here are the eleven verses recently found:

1 From Paul, a brother of Jesus, by spiritual adoption into the Father's family. I and all the group with me send greetings to all the Christians of America. May you continue to be happy in Jesus our Lord.

2 I find it incredible, brothers, that you leave so quickly the teachings of Jesus. His explicit command was that we love our enemies, pray for them and do good to them; and yet you condone the violent killing of those who oppose you. I refer specifically to the peoples of Southeast Asia. I beg you to rejoin the ranks of the Prince of Peace.

3 It has also come to my attention that much of the church has created a physical kingdom, unlike anything our Lord intended. I have heard that groups of believers spend great amounts of money on their meeting places. You are giving more attention to bond programs, salaries, and "sanctuaries" than to the work of the Kingdom.

4 May I remind you that the Father's only sanctuary is in the hearts of His children. Please stop dedicating multi-purpose buildings and dedicate yourselves to Him.

5 Consider the needs of your communities more than your own comforts. Much of the population is in need of housing, and even though many of your church leaders grow fat, people are still hungry. Attempt to love the world as our Lord did.

6 Show your love in practical ways, such as picking up hitchhikers.

7 It is reported that some groups of Christians are saying that since they interpret the Scriptures properly and other groups do not, they are the only true believers in Jesus. This is absurd and from Satan.

8 Remember that we have no righteousness of our own and that we are not saved by being "right." The brothers who indulge in these judgments serve as a reminder that phariseism is not dead. Remember which kingdom you have given allegiance to. Patriotism which results in bigotry and nationalism which results in hatred are from Satan. Remind the white and black brothers that if they cannot love each other, they have no right to say they love God.

9 When exhausted, bored or without sleep, beware of finding false strength or peace through drugs. This warning is for everyone.

10 You have died to the world's view of success. This applies to parents who work several jobs so that you may enjoy the world's luxuries to the neglect of your children.

11 Do not put your security into savings accounts, comprehensive insurance policies or medical coverage. Instead trust in our Lord Jesus.

Well, there you have it. The newly-found parchment. Have no fear, though, for latest investigations have shown that the author was definitely not St. Paul the Apostle, but Paul Smith, an ex-junkie turned Jesus Freak from Seattle. Of course this was no surprise to most of us, since we remembered that the real Paul always called us "ye." Besides, our Paul would never have written anything like this. So relax, Christians. Its authenticity has been disproved. Go back to reading about veils and meat offered to idols.

" . . . if you preach the Gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time, you are not preaching the Gospel at all" (Martin Luther).

SELECTED POEMS BY CRAIG M. WATTS

Security Through the Eyes of a Lost Man

In the mist of tomorrow
I've forgotten today.
For the future I've borrowed,
And I cannot repay
The unnamed, unseen sum
For security of days not come.
The fortress around me
Of plastic and steel
May seem to have bound me,
But now I can't feel
The reality of uncertainty,
And the pressing of eternity.
My all is the unpromised to-
morrow
In a world of today's sorrow:

The Leaders

World leaders are around us
And in loud voices they say,
"Come, follow us to glory,
For we have found the way."
Their names are in newspapers,
And a spotlight's on each face.
In the clamor and the crowd
They think they've found a
place.
As the center of attraction
They rise upon their stands,
And wave their flashy colors
Before their booming bands.
But in convincing speeches
The truth is somehow lost.
To them that counts but little;

They're prepared to pay the
cost.
The disillusioned masses
Whose devotion they have held
Will soon be confronted
With the power the leaders
wield.
Then the grandeur and the
glory
These leaders claim to give
Will have little meaning,
For we'll all cease to live.
But confident of all things,
They lead men to death's
flame,
And freely use men's lives
To obtain their own fame,
Using leadership as license.
Mankind follows them to hell,
While cheers conceal the truth
That all is not well.

But, Lord, we know the enemy
Cannot be killed in war;
For there many men die,
But really nothing more.
Nor can governmental systems
Ever give security:
They usually tend to bind men
Rather than to set men free.
So I will not rest my hope
Upon the leaders of the land,
Nor depend upon the nations
For which the leaders stand.
For You alone with Your
power
Can bind the enemy.
And You alone with Your love
Can give life eternally.
So, Lord, with all that's in me

I give myself to you,
For it is your leadership alone
We can trust to be true.

Romans Chapters 1-8

When the dust settles,
And the crashing, exploding
voice
Dies down,
The worthlessness of
The human temples
And palaces will be exposed.
There will be no one
To weep over the ruins,
For those who once possessed
the palaces
Will be possessed by them.
And those who once built the
temples
Will have the ruins of those
temples
Built upon them.
No archaeologist will ever read
The story the ruins tell,
But the message will be plain:
"God gave them up."

But praise God!
For there will be those
Who have given themselves up
first.
And he will take them up.
And their faith will become
knowledge:
True Reality is Spirituality.

Letters

Criticizing the Critics

Regarding the responses of brothers Hawk and Bales to Don Haymes' June article . . . I can only say with sadness that once again distrust, suspicion, and pride have separated our number. Brother Hawk claims title to the Truth. The inherent beauty of that statement is lost in its presumption that Truth belongs to only an isolated segment of Christendom. Brother Bales seems preoccupied with identifying "modernists." (Why do we expend so much effort classifying brethren and so little in rejoicing with them in Christ?)

It seems to be a peculiar trait of humanity that with increased problems of truly serious import, we insist on intensifying our problems and burdens with meaningless, trivial details—"overlooking the weightier matters." I realize that many of us demand the security of finding all the answers in our religious lives and filing them away neatly in a box; and furthermore, that often our sense of Christian duty compels us to shackle others with *our* personal opinions and biases. This Christ did not intend. God plainly told us that complete knowledge was reserved for Him alone. And through Paul he reminds us of the freedom we may enjoy through His Son. Why, then, won't we permit ourselves this great privilege?

I too pray with Dr. Bales—but for ALL of us—not just Don Haymes.

TOM WILLIAMS

San Marcos, Texas

I read with some humor yet distress some of the thoughts recently expressed by Ray Hawk and James D. Bales [Letters, August]. My first impression as I read was: what an unloving attitude they have. These letters were so full of resentment and hatred. They were harsh and judgmental. Bales and Hawk well illustrated characteristics of first-century Pharisaism and self-righteousness. I was discouraged by their thoughts. Surely they are a

minority in the Church of Christ, but I am suspicious there are probably more. The first century church had the Pharisees, and I guess we can have the same attitude in the 20th century also. Hawk is arrogance at its best as he scoops down from his lofty perch with outstretched talons and states "the only difference is we preach the truth and he preaches error." You can just see and feel the self-righteousness of such a statement. Since he has truth and no error, I wish I could sit at his feet and learn some of these truths he must have deciphered out of the text of the Bible or perhaps from Sunday school material, tracts or books written by members of the Church of Christ. We all have truth when we accept Christ as Lord and this includes Warren Lewis, Don Haymes, James D. Bales and even Ray Hawk, but to make a statement, "I have truth and he has error," is going beyond the truth and making a judgment I personally would prefer to let God make (Matt. 7:1-5).

It appears that one of Bales' favorite words is modernist. It seems that anyone who differs with his opinions is immediately dubbed a modernist. To me the word means one who denies the inspiration of the Word, the divinity of Christ, or the resurrection, through the use of modern science. I know of no one in the Church of Christ that does this; perhaps they are there, but they sure are quiet about it. Warren Lewis is not a modernist; at least his writings do not reflect it. Lewis' excellent article in *Mission* was most interesting and challenging. He was not denying the inspiration of the Bible. He quoted 2 Tim. 3:16-17 and said "it is every scripture itself which is breathed of God," or inspired of God. Bales probably disagrees with him on Lewis' view of "verbal dictation" or "plenary inspiration," thus Lewis disagrees with Bales' opinion thus Lewis is called a modernist by Bales. Lewis simply pointed out some new truths I haven't thought of before. It didn't destroy my faith, but it strengthened it. Nor has it destroyed his or that of any other who truly has sincere faith in Christ. The article helped me to see the human element in scripture and how God has used human vehicles to communicate to mankind. After all, he himself appeared in human form. A conservative book that helped me to appreciate Warren Lewis' article is

The New Testament and Criticism by George Eldon Ladd (Eerdmans). It would be well if Bishop Bales and Heavenly Hawk could bring themselves to read this book.

Not meaning any offence to Bales, but having read some of his writings in other journals and books, I feel he is a very negative writer. He is always purging, disfellowshipping, dismissing, labeling fellow Christians, striving "to change the nature of a certain journal or contribute to its cessation," and finding fault in certain evangelistic efforts. To me this is creating strife, dissension, and causes division which Gal. 5:19-21 equates to fornication and condemns to hell.

It was interesting to note some of the scriptures Bales uses to back his purging: (1) Matt. 3:12—Refers to the impending judgment of God. Evidently Bales must equate himself with God and feel he too can judge man. (2) John 15:2—Refers to Christians or unbelieving Israelites not faithful to Christ; the judgment. Not faithful to Christ in God's terms, not Bales' terms. Again judgment is rendered by Bales. (3) 1 Cor. 5:7—Refers to purging a fornicator. Surely Warren Lewis is not fornicating, or does Bales have something on him? (4) 2 Tim. 2:21—Refers to purging of oneself of evil things or separating oneself from people who might upset people's faith by saying that our resurrection has already taken place. Probably Bales has taken away "our resurrection has already taken place" from this scripture and added to it "the clashes and jars of the Gospels." If he can do this, I can add to it "the judgmental attitude" that upsets people's faith. (5) Heb. 9:14—The blood of Christ purges or cleanses one's conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

It seems that Bales has pulled these references out of context to show the necessity of purging a brother in Christ. How can he disfellowship one whom God fellowships? It appears that friends of God are not [necessarily] friends of Bales.

I found a scriptural basis for writing this letter in the context of 2 Tim. 2:23-26 ("a slave of the Lord must not quarrel but must be gentle to everybody"). I hope I have been gentle and not quarrelsome. I was motivated by love and the harm I see in the attitudes of Hawk and Bales.

They may say I have contradicted myself and was judgmental toward them, and I could well have been, but not intentionally. But then I could use (as I have seen used many times) to justify myself 2 Tim. 4:2-4: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts." And for even heavier emphasis I could throw in Matt. 23:13-33 and Matt. 15:7-9.

Now Bales, I found these scriptures first; don't you turn them around and use them on me. I hope you see the foolishness of such.

James D. Bales and Ray Hawk, I am praying for you both. This is a favorite expression that shows one's righteousness and another's error.

DON LEDBETTER

Houston, Texas

Musical Notes

Concerning Stan Paregien's article, we observe: *First*, J.W. McGarvey regarded the instrument as "a sinful innovation," he moved his membership from the congregation where it was introduced, although he would attend services where it was used if no other place was available. *Second*, how we shall worship is not a complicated matter. The evidence is clear, as he admits, that the New Testament church did not use it. It is simple to learn we are to sing. The complications come because of the thousand and one arguments which people get up to justify instruments. *Third*, there are similarities between synagogue services and those of the church but the worship of the church was not patterned on the synagogue but on the will of God. The cultural context was for instruments in that they were used by Jews in the temple, and by the pagans also. *Fourth*, in the very nature of the case, when the instrument is used the line is drawn against those who cannot conscientiously accept it. Its introduction, and presence, says that we either worship with it or get out.

JAMES D. BALES

Searcy, Arkansas