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THE RESTORATION ILLUSION

DON HAYMES

Dover, New Jersey

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and the people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins."

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck the ears of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath."

—Mark 2:18-28

It is the unhappy fate of anyone who would speak or write as a Christian that he must, by the very nature of his task, call into question the most cherished of human illusions. I say "unhappy" even while I say that Christian writing and preaching are, first and foremost, acts of liberation—for most of us do not want to be freed from our illusions, no matter how much pain and anguish they may have caused. In the Churches of Christ, we have spent a lot of time on the road to freedom looking for a vehicle to carry along our cultural and "religious" baggage.

Much of the strife and dissension we have endured as a Church over the past decade or so can be attributed to the tension between what our lives in Christ were becoming and what our vision of the Church had been. From "otherwhen and elsewhere," as William C. Martin has said, we in the Churches of Christ have brought forward and sought to impose upon every environment and situation a concept of the Church that we like to call "the Restoration Principle." As the years passed, the changing and unchanging attitudes of the various members of this Church toward the Restoration Principle have been a major factor in its struggles and metamorphoses.

I

More than a year ago, my friend Tom Blake, who was then a minister in Canada, published in the *Christian Chronicle* as clear and concise a statement of the themes embodied in the Restoration

Principle as I have ever seen. I have chosen to quote from it here because it defines Restoration ideology and objectives with clarity and partisan energy:

... the Church of Christ had and has a commitment to undenominational New Testament Christianity. Our commitment was and still is to attempt to find the pattern of the original Church as set forth in the New Testament and to order our congregations to that pattern as much as possible. We have been committed to the position that a restoration of God's original Church is the only pattern that is pleasing to Him. Thus, all other Churches find their origin in man-made traditions and are sects—therefore not acceptable to God. The original pattern has governed how we have worshiped and how we have preached that a person accepts Jesus Christ. It has been this plea for the Restoration of God's One Original Church and His condemnation of all man-made religious bodies that has made us unique and not a part of conservative evangelical Protestantism.*

On the basis of this statement, Mr. Blake proceeds to ask what he calls "the real questions." These queries are deeply rooted in Restoration tradition, and they are the final line of battle for many Church of Christ leaders. They are phrased in a hard-nosed fashion, but they deserve a thoughtful response—for that is what they have seldom received in this century. These questions come from the heart of the Restoration Illusion.

Do we still accept this Restoration plea as valid? Do we still believe that there is a pattern for the One Original Church in the New Testament, and is it possible to restore it? Do we still believe that denominations are of man-made origin and not Biblically based—thus not acceptable to God? Do we still believe the Churches of Christ are God's Church in the world today? Do we still believe that the changes man has brought into worship of God cause him to be unacceptable to God and condemned on that last day?

*Interested readers will find Mr. Blake's statement on p. 3 of the June 17, 1972 *Christian Chronicle*.

Do we still believe that God's Plan for man's response to Jesus Christ involves immersion in water for the remission of sins and if one hasn't gone through that experience, he is not God's Child no matter what the outward evidence would seem to indicate?

"Yes, this is a narrow position," Mr. Blake concludes, "but I believe with all my heart it is the most Biblical position available in the world today." Generations of members of the Churches of Christ have had no choice but to answer these questions with a resounding "Yes!"; any other response would have called into question the entire enterprise of Restoration. Mr. Blake has carefully summarized in his statement and accompanying questions the very real creed of the Churches of Christ. This he very candidly acknowledges, and defends the use of such a creed by defining it as "an accepted system of religious belief." Such candor is commendable; there is, at least, no doubletalk about "no creed but Christ" here. Further, it is implicit in this creed that all who would call themselves members of the Churches of Christ must swear to it or get out.

An Analogy . . .

I believe our situation is analogous to that of the disciples of Jesus in Mark 2. Jesus and his men were asked to accommodate themselves to the structures and activities imposed by Jewish religious law: on certain days you were supposed to fast, according to these canons, whether you needed to or not. Jesus' reply cut to the heart of the difficulty, for he knew that the new wine of Grace would never be compatible with the old wineskins of the Law. Jesus knew that fasting, like other facets of the Law, had its basis in certain human needs; fasting for the sake of fasting is ludicrous, but fasting which arises out of need can produce spiritual blessings. "The sabbath was made for man,"

Jesus said, "not man for the sabbath." Salvation under the Law was and is an illusion, for no man nor woman can achieve redemption, healing, or liberation in adherence to a legal code, no matter how stringently it may be observed.

This is the first great illusion embodied in the Restoration Principle: that there is an Original Pattern or code of laws in which are outlined the corporate structures of the Church, and that a Christian must observe in every point to be "acceptable to God." I would suggest that many of those who have preached this doctrine have equated what is acceptable to God with what is acceptable to themselves, for they have often been highly selective in the choice of what or what not to "restore." Predictably, this has resulted in strife and confusion, with each of many different sects claiming to have restored the Original Pattern. All of these sects rely on a blueprint which is simply not to be found in the pages of the New Testament.

The "One Original Church" . . .

Where is the One Original Church in the New Testament? Is it Jerusalem? Well, Jerusalem is certainly the original Church, founded by the preaching of Peter at Pentecost. Have we restored it? Let's look at the record:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:44-47).

But wait! This was a special situation, because of all those pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost and had stayed after their conversions, and anyway they were expecting Jesus to come back at any moment

and . . . ahhhhh. That's right, this is a special situation. But isn't it beautiful? Don't we long for that kind of spirit among us? Of course, if we "restored" according to this "pattern" we'd have to sell everything we have and move in with one another and attend the local synagogue daily, all of which would create no end of havoc. But even the most demanding Restorationist will be quick to admit that the spirit of the Jerusalem Church is what matters for us, not the pattern of its organization and day-to-day existence.

But so much for Jerusalem; what about Corinth? Many contemporary congregations have made a very good start on restoring the pattern of Corinth, with the dissension between rationalists and tongue-speakers, not to mention somewhat more earthy activities; will this make them "acceptable to God"? What about the pattern of Galatia? Certainly, many congregations have had their share of "false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage"; some of us have even, on occasion, been "foolish"; are we, on this basis, "pleasing to God"? And there are so many other Churches described or merely mentioned in the New Testament: Ephesus, Thyatira, Smyrna, Sardis, Antioch, Laodicea, Philadelphia, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Troas, Rome, and more—all different, all beset by unique difficulties, all responding to Christ and to their cultures in different ways. Some were pleasing God, some were not, but what made them pleasing was following Jesus Christ, not adherence to an all-encompassing pattern for church structures.

The Restoration Principle is not found in the New Testament; it is, rather, a method of interpreting the New Testament. As such, it has been highly selective. Why observe the

Lord's Supper and reject the washing of feet? Is a handshake a substitute for a holy kiss? (Just try shaking hands with your wife when you go off to work in the morning!) Restorationists of one persuasion attack those of another for using the piano to accompany hymns sung in assemblies, while defending the use of many communion cups or Sunday schools or participation in a cooperative mission with other congregations with the same arguments used by the other groups to defend the use of the piano! And I shall never forget the Church of the Upper Room in Abilene, Texas, which met in a small building mounted on 20-foot stilts; after all, as we know, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in an "upper room" (Mk. 14:15), and the Christians in Troas met in an "upper chamber" (Acts 20:8).

Now a convinced Restorationist in any of these sects may wish to suggest that those groups of Christians which have restored more or less than he wants to restore are "wrong," but how can he be *sure*? How can he be *certain* that the canons he has used are correct, while others are in error? Other groups would cast him outside the pale; how can he be *positive* that he is inside?

The plight of the Restorationist is sad, for he is caught in his own trap, and it is a cruel habitation. Every day he is judged by his own judgment. But Jesus offers him an alternative:

For it is by his grace you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to devote ourselves to the good works for which God has designed us (Eph. 2:8-10 NEB).

II

Restoration is not only a method of interpreting the New Testament; it is also a

historical movement and a way of looking at Church history. It is wishful thinking about Church history—the belief that Restoration as an ideology and as a movement is somehow unique in history—that forms the backbone of another great Restoration illusion.

According to Restoration dogma, Church history comes to a screeching halt with some sort of "Great Apostasy"—as if that moment could somehow be crystalized—and does not begin again until Alexander Campbell gets off the boat which brought him to America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This ridiculous theory of history overlooks an enormous number of men and movements, from Marcion, who assembled the first canon of New Testament Scripture, to Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, Hubmaier, and the thousands in between—all of whom prepared the way for Campbell, all of whom believed in what Campbell called "Reform." In the context of Church history, from Pentecost to the present, Restoration is hardly unique; it is certainly not sacred. Restoration is, in fact, only as credible as those who claim to practice it.

Like all reform movements, Restoration has been influenced as much by its cultural and political milieu as by Scripture, if not more so. As a tactic, Restoration came into being and had its uses on the American Frontier in the nineteenth century; whether those uses obtain today is at least open to question. I do not intend to demean the contribution to Christian history of the Restoration Fathers; I am sure, furthermore, that their thoughts and experiences can be of great value to Christians in our time. But it is neither possible nor desirable to "restore the Restoration" (and I would add in passing that if we cannot return to the nineteenth century, we shall most certainly not return to the first!); further, I would submit that if

the Restoration heritage of thought and experience is to be useful in uniting its many sectarian heirs in fellowship and mission, then it must be examined far more carefully and critically (in the positive sense of that word!) than has previously been the case. In this connection it is useful to note the melancholy comments of no less a scholar than Dr. Thomas H. Olbricht, who cites in the June, 1973, issue of *Mission* the distortion of Restoration history for public relations purposes.

Restoration and the Civil War . . .

Now I am neither a scholar nor a son of a scholar, but I believe I know where to begin; simply stated, my proposition is that the major divisions of the Restoration Movement had their origin not in theology or doctrine or the pages of Scripture, but rather in cultural and political strife: the causes of the Restoration division were also the causes of the Civil War.

Whatever the consternation it may cause, this thesis is neither new nor particularly remarkable. Every major American denomination suffered turmoil and upheaval because of the Civil War, and the Churches of Christ are no exception. I call to the attention of interested readers an excellent book which, while it fails to mention the Restoration Churches specifically, defines the situation more eloquently, clearly, and completely than I could ever hope to explain it: *The Mind of the South*, by W.J. Cash, especially pp. 81-84 and 133-145 in the Vintage paperback edition. The late Mr. Cash explores the "solidification" (as he calls it) of the South in the pressure of conflict with "the Yankee," a term which came to include all ideas and practices which were new or "modern." Three paragraphs should serve here to describe what I have in mind:

More notable yet was the influence of conflict and solidification upon the religious pattern. Under its influence, God began rapidly to be distinctly a tribal God. He remained Jehovah, certainly. As time went on, indeed, he became more purely Jehovah—the stern, simple, direct, God of the Old Testament, with elements of the Apocalypse added, the God of battles and the flaming sword, and of the pale horsemen and the winepress of blood. A severe, almost primitive, naivete of belief and feeling got to be the fashion, sweeping back even such sophistication of religion as was already growing up, and penetrating gradually almost into the very strongholds of the Virginians themselves. If the falling of the stars in 1833 could still be interpreted rationally by the more enlightened sort of evangelical ministers, there were not many non-Anglican pulpits left in the South in 1857 which did not see the passage of Donati's great comet as a herald of the imminent outpouring of divine wrath. And not every Anglican church was immune to intimations of the kind.

But nobody intimated or suspected that this wrath might possibly pour upon the South itself. The South, men said and did not doubt, was peculiarly Christian; probably, indeed, it was the last great bulwark of Christianity. From the pulpit the word went forth that infidelity and a new paganism masking under the name of Science were sweeping the world. From pulpit and hustings ran the dark suggestion that the God of the Yankee was not God at all but Antichrist loosed at last from the pit. The coming war would be no mere secular contest but Armageddon, with the South standing in the role of the defender of the ark, its people as the Chosen People.

You may suspect me of picturesque extravagance? Then hear the Presbyterian Dr. J.H. Thornwell declaiming in 1850, the year before his countrymen were to call him to the presidency of the College of South Carolina, from which he had some time ejected Dr. Cooper for his "infidel" views: "The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders—they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, jacobins on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battleground—Christianity and atheism the combat-

ants; and the progress of humanity the stake" (pp. 82-83).

All of which sounds very familiar, doesn't it? This history of solidification and conflict sets the stage for a study of the real causes of Restoration division:

- 1) Is it any accident that the battle over the instrument was joined in a *border state* (what a prophetic name, *Midway, Kentucky!*) in 1859?
- 2) Is it not significant that the non-instrument faction found its strength in the South, while the Disciples flourished in the urban North?
- 3) Is it not significant that the anti-organization segment of the instrument faction began and found strength in the border state region along the Ohio River?
- 4) Is there not a significant body of literature reflecting the divisive effects of regional politics on the Restoration from such men as David Lipscomb and Tolbert Fanning?
- 5) Is not the great symbol of the Restoration Schism to be found in the two sons of Alexander Campbell's flesh, one of whom wore Confederate gray and the other Union blue?

I propose that a Unity Forum in the near future empanel a commission of qualified historians to discuss this proposition and its implications. To ensure diligence in pursuit of truth, these historians should be without ties to congregations, papers, or Church colleges—one who immediately comes to mind is Professor David Edwin Harrell of the University of Alabama, who is a member of both the NAACP and the anti-cooperation segment of the Churches of Christ. Such a colloquy should be a major step toward ridding ourselves of our illusions and pointing us toward our serious tasks.

III

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with human deductions about the Biblical text or any "accepted system of religious belief"; the Good News of Jesus is redemptive power in every aspect of human life:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good
news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

(Luke 4:18-19)

How great a need there is for this Good News in the world today! At a time when the whole world is becoming an armed camp; when men are driven by despair and degradation to commit inhuman acts against one another; when people are starving in this country in the midst of the greatest bounty the world has ever seen; when, due to a cruel and inhuman religion, thousands of people starve to death every day in the streets of Calcutta because they cannot kill the sacred cattle that roam the streets—then there is no time for ridiculous squabbles about religious ceremonies and religious structures. The Good News of Jesus Christ is liberation, healing, justice, love. It is life in Christ. It is becoming the presence of Christ in the midst of the world. It is release to the captives and liberty to the oppressed. It is life—the life of Jesus Christ.

This is the life, dear fellow members of the Churches of Christ, that Jesus has brought us so far to find. Please, let us not attempt to patch this new cloth onto the old garment of Restorationism, for the garment will only be rent asunder. The new wine of life in Jesus will only burst the old wineskins of the Law, no matter how the Law is disguised. We are free—free in Christ

—and no man nor code can take that away from us. We are free to follow where he leads us, taking with us only what we need.

Are we then to take leave of the Churches of Christ, taking refuge under the wings of some other denomination, some other sad fragment of the Lord's Body? God forbid! Of what advantage is it to leap from one pool of turmoil to another? In the Churches which gave us faith, we can find faith again—and no would-be Pope or Inquisitor can hold us in his dominion! We are free to be Chris-

tians in the Churches of Christ, and we must be.

It will not be simple or easy. And yet, as A.E. Housman has written:

The house of delusions is cheap to build, but draughty to live in, and ready at any instant to fall; and it is surely truer prudence to move our furniture betimes into the open air than to stay indoors until our tenement tumbles about our ears.

Surely, it is truer prudence for us—for when we move into the open air of Reality, Jesus is already there. □

The book of Romans, then, teaches us why we have the Holy Spirit (who, incidentally, is not something we have and yet never know we do except by reading in the Bible that we are supposed to). God's Spirit, who is a definite personality, has real purpose in our lives, to work in us and direct us, and to give us strength and power to live for Him. This is vital, for "we must yield our bodies to him as implements for doing right, and sin will no longer be our master" (Rom. 6:13), which is exactly what being born again means (Jn. 3:3; Gal. 2:20).

Fruits and Assurance . . .

Some people, realizing they should have the fruits of the Spirit, through sheer will power attain a few good characteristics; but they aren't really changed inside, and that is one big difference! Even if they could manage this change "in the flesh," they would not please God, for he wants to accomplish this himself so that we will have no reason to boast and that others may see Christ in us. We must allow the Spirit to work in us and change us: "If by the Spirit you put to death all base pursuits of the body, then you will live" (Rom. 8:13). When we yield to him, we make a decision to let him work in us; and as each situation arises, we ask him to give us the right response. We can never reach the purity that God wants in us if we are controlled by the flesh, but we can attain the high plateau of life indicated in Romans 8 if we are directed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit actually gives us new life—in this life (Rom. 8:11), and when our fleshly bodies die (6:5-11). Through him, then, we are freed from the bondage of sin and the bondage of death.

1 John 4:13 tells us we can be sure God dwells in us by the Spirit he has given us.

Thus we can know if we have his Spirit, and this knowledge yields some marvelous fruits. First is the assurance we are his sons and are saved (Rom. 8:14-15), which comes from completely trusting Jesus for salvation, and not in any rules, regulations, churches, or systems. Knowing that we are his sons brings the first three fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, and peace. I used to try to tell myself I had them; now I laugh at that charade because the present fruits are so beautiful. Since there is no doubt that Jesus can save, I have peace, joy and love that pass understanding.

The other fruits are a little harder to come by, but nevertheless bring assurance that one has the Holy Spirit. These fruits cannot be duplicated by Satan or the flesh; therefore we can trust the scriptural test for false prophets (Mt. 7:15-21), since the only way we can bear fruit is to dwell in Jesus (Jn. 15:5-6). When we dwell in him, he works in us, changes us, and enables us to be a glory to God in bearing fruit (15:8). On the other hand, the scriptures make clear what happens to those who bear no fruit (Mt. 3:10). Bearing fruit entails doing the Father's will, and Jesus tells us: "Not every one who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father" (Mt. 7:19-20). The only way we can receive forgiveness of sins is to "walk in the light as he is in the light [spirit?], then we share together a common life, and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son" (1 Jn. 1:6-7).

The most astonishing result is receiving the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-16) and being able to understand many passages that were previously indecipherable, and understanding in new light those we thought to

Why the Holy Spirit?

A. L. FOX

Bernalillo, New Mexico

A crucial statement of religious experience is Romans 3:20: "For no human being can be justified in the sight of God for having kept the law: law brings only consciousness of sin." Paul applies this disturbing fact to himself in Romans 7:24: "Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me out of this body doomed to death?" Then he announces the answer: "God alone through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And adds: "There is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ, because in Christ Jesus the life-giving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death."

For many this means only that we are free from Moses' law and that the law of the

Spirit is just another set of rules to follow. We are free from Moses' law, but we are not under another set of rules. Rather, we are no longer under the bondage of sin; Satan has no power over us, since we have the Spirit (which is life in us). I used to wonder what that meant, for although I was a Christian for many years, I was not really free. Although I did not commit the outward "more grievous" sins, sin did have power over me in many ways. Because I was trying on my own to overcome sin, I had no success. Now I praise God for the way he has freed me through his Spirit, for as someone has said, "If you are only a little bit free, then you are not really free at all."

mean something different. This is because the Spirit actually teaches us (1 Jn. 2:26). 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us that since the scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand them without the Spirit revealing them.

The last result—and one of the most beautiful—is yielding so completely that others can see Jesus in us. In Romans 8:30 Paul tells us that “those God has called he has justified, and those whom he has justified he has given his glory.” If we allow the Spirit to fill us and direct us we will “reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord; thus we are transformed into his likeness, from glory to glory; such is the influence of the Lord who is Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

This chapter (vv. 8-11) assures us that the dispensation of the Spirit is to endure. There is no hint that he will go into semi-retirement after a few hundred years. 1 Cor. 13:10, which some people use to say that gifts will pass away, actually says they will; but what few realize is that it also says when. The KJV uses the word “perfect”; the NEB, “wholeness.” Both refer to the time when man will be perfected on the Day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). The latter part of the chapter bears this out, for it goes on to say that “then [when the perfect comes] we will see [God] face to face” and that our knowledge will be whole. Having the Bible in written form hasn’t done that for anyone yet.

This understanding should help us realize that the reason the body of Christ is not what it should be today is because we have not allowed the Holy Spirit to do his work and give his spiritual gifts. Man cannot edify or build up himself, as Ephesians 4 enjoins, so he must turn to God for this and accept Christ’s gifts, that we might “at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God—to mature

manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ.” Who can reach the full stature of Christ without a spiritual gift? How can we show the glory of God without the Holy Spirit? How can we understand the word and bear fruit? How can the body possibly attain the fullness of Christ, how can we teach others, and how can we please God without the Holy Spirit working in our lives?

Modern Pharisees . . .

We are all appalled at how the Pharisees refused to see the works that Jesus did by the Holy Spirit, but isn’t this what some do today when they hear or read about some wonderful thing Jesus did by the Holy Spirit? He still heals the sick, blind, crippled, and—most amazing of all—he changes men from ugly, hateful, self-centered people to lovely, kind, love-filled people. Yet our modern-day Pharisees say, “I don’t believe it because I don’t understand the Bible to say it’s still supposed to happen.” We have to accept God and Jesus by faith, so why not accept the Holy Spirit by faith? Satan’s most clever work is to keep people from accepting the Holy Spirit and being born again. If a man accepts God and Christ, and yet rejects the Holy Spirit, he rejects God’s plan whereby man may be perfected and in effect says, “Please, Lord, I had rather do this myself.”

It seems that the actual testing of the Spirit should prove whether he works today as in the first century. One cannot overlook a completely changed life at the age of 45, a person sent home to die of cancer suddenly in perfect health, or people so filled with God’s love that you fancy you are with Christ in their presence. As Jesus says in Matt. 7:20: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” □

REACTION

A Second Look at Homosexuality

CRAIG M. WATTS

Flint, Michigan

“There is the man who is stocked with the correct responses for any situation; they come out pat when you press the appropriate button, and it’s with a sinking feeling that you pick up the little card which pops out of the slot, knowing that it’s been pre-printed and that the rehearsal of your miserable symptoms was largely superfluous—in fact you’d hardly uttered the syllables ‘homo’ before the machine began whirring out its answer,” legitimately complains one homosexual, Alex Davidson, the author of *The Returns of Love*.

The Returns of Love is an attempt to state a contemporary Christian view of homosexuality. There is much ignorance about this subject and few seem to understand what the Bible says in relationship to homosexuality. Penny Holden’s article, “God’s Stand on Homosexuality” (August *Integrity*) is an example of the narrow understanding and swift condemnation I believe to be very typical of the average church member. We desperately need to take another look at this problem in light of modern psychiatry and the word of God. I do not claim to have an exhaustive knowledge of either but perhaps the little that I do know will help some at least.

First, let us approach this from a Biblical point of view. To claim that the scriptures

condemn homosexuality is a superficial and ambiguous statement. The issue is more complex than that. We must distinguish between the *practice* and the *condition* of homosexuality. This added complication is necessary if we are to have any truly Biblical answer at all.

It is undeniably plain that homosexual activity is condemned in the scriptures. All of the scriptures cited in Ms. Holden’s article support this fact. But on the other hand, the homosexual condition is not condemned; as a matter of fact, it is not even mentioned. This is the all important fact that most overlook. With no scriptural justification, too many have made blanket condemnations. Some never even realize that the Bible is silent in relationship to this condition, but the distinction must be maintained.

Secondly, though homosexual activity is sinful and a plain transgression of God’s design, the homosexual condition is a sickness. And like any other sickness, though it is not a sin it is in no way good. But in the face of the preponderance of current medical opinion, Penny Holden and too many others flatly state, “It is not classified as a sickness.”

Armand M. Nicholi, psychiatrist from the Harvard Medical School, classifies homosex-

uality as "a form of psychopathology that warrants medical intervention." He also reveals, "Recent research findings disclose a statistically significantly higher incidence of cold, rejecting fathers within the family background of homosexuals, producing within many a yearning for a warm, accepting, loving father." The condition being rooted in the past did not arise by the affected individual's choice but its domination of one's actions is a matter of choice.

Third, the swift condemnation approach to homosexuality discourages open confession and may cause so much shame that those with the problem will not seek out competent guidance for fear of being found out. Not many are foolish enough to open up to anyone who will most likely respond with scalding criticism. When one is intolerably burdened with massive difficulties of the caliber of those that accompany homosexuality, harsh judgment is the last thing needed. Condemning an action may help a person recognize his deficiencies but continual renunciation will likely drag the struggler into the pits of despair from which he may never climb.

The Church's Ministry . . .

But how can the church minister to the homosexual condition without compromising its stand on homosexual actions? I will offer a few suggestions to be considered.

We should start with some honest understanding. It is surprising how much some people need a simple listening ear. It is such a relief just to be able to find someone who will take time to care. When the burden of life seems too hard to bear, how refreshing it is to find someone who is willing to share the weight of it all. Not many of us can provide authoritative answers to many of the

questions that may arise, but all of us have the capacity to listen.

In addition to that, we as a fellowship can help fill the loneliness that often accompanies homosexuality. Though the atmosphere is becoming more and more open, the confessed homosexual generally has a difficult time being accepted in normal social circles. As a result he too often is forced to find companionship in others who share his problem. A worsening of his condition will likely be the result. If we remain as loving as Christ would have us be, perhaps the homosexual will see the Christian community as a refuge. Remember, it was the misfits and rejects that flocked to Jesus two thousand years ago.

As noted previously, homosexuals often are in need of an affectionate loving father figure. In God the Father this emotional need can be met. The cruel taskmaster that many imagine God to be will be no help at all, but the sacrificing Father of Jesus Christ is the Father we all need.

Dr. Nicholi has observed, "Most homosexuals tend not to be motivated. Unlike neurotics, they obtain a certain release of tension and gratification from their symptoms." A firm commitment to Jesus can provide significant motivation to change. The conflict between homosexual impulses and spiritual responsibility forces one to exhibit strength not previously experienced. In the words of Alex Davidson, "Because God's reach encompasses the whole world of morality, however far His law requires me to go His love will be there to enable me."

With love, acceptance (not approval), understanding, motivation, and competent professional help, there is a probability of therapeutic success. Our approach to the problem will determine whether we as Christians will be an instrument of hindrance or hope. □

God's Men, Women, and Donkeys

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Current discussions regarding what we understand Paul to teach in 1 Corinthians may well indicate that we are in the same situation as the first century Corinthian church. A fundamental failure of the Corinthians was their carnality, and our recognition of the possibility that we are afflicted with the same disability may be a major step toward becoming what we were intended to be in Christ Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 Paul stressed what grace had been given to the Corinthians: that they were enriched in Christ "in every way," and that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift, but that all spiritual riches were theirs for the taking in the fellowship of Christ. But from this spiritual peak Paul moves down to their actual carnal condition in 3:1. In the discussion leading up to this appraisal, he told them in 2:14: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (discernment being a gift also). Although he began the letter with a reminder that every gift had been provided for them, he had to point out that they were still very carnal men—being under the bondage of the carnal society which has continued since Adam. Specifically, they had not discerned spiritually what had been granted to them: they took credit to themselves, boasted in fleshly pride (4:7), but failed to appreciate that their gifts came from God.

Since those brothers were "behaving like ordinary men," they had not realized their rightful status in the fellowship of Jesus

Christ our Lord. Paul had to keep reminding them that "all things are yours," for they had not yet appropriated even the hem of the garment of what Jesus had won for them.

In dealing with their carnality, which was evident in the situations about which they had written to him, Paul had to point them occasionally to the requirements of law—as if they were in the position of having to be brought to Christ again by the "schoolmaster." As with the Galatians, he was in travail all over again until Christ should be formed within them. He also urged them to look to the Father himself for their guidance, just as he did, and as Christ did in imitating what he saw and heard in the Father. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." This is the key to spirituality.

Carnality among Christians is not unrelated to the question of woman's participation in worship. Woman, being the first to fall into carnality, has most frequently been the first to want out of it. And, as Jesus taught (Lk. 11:9-13), desire is an important requisite to achievement. It is my belief, based on observation and experience, that the very personal consequences to woman of the fall, affecting her body, soul, and spirit, have caused her to see her predicament more readily, and therefore have induced her to search for and receive the way back more readily. (This view attributes no special merit to woman; it is merely the way God has made her.) The way back for her, of course, is Jesus Christ, who brings her back to the Father's deep communion and perfect freedom.

Integrity

The first issue of *Integrity* (June, 1969) began a work which we committed to God, asking him to use us as long as he wanted, then put us out of business. At times he has kept us guessing about the source of money for the next issue, but it has always come in, with the supply invariably very close to the need. We have received valuable discipline from operating this way. Positive reactions from readers have far exceeded our initial expectations, and that thought has reminded us that some comments in the first editorial might be of interest to the thousands of current readers who never saw it. Hence the following excerpts:

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

In keeping with the connotation of its name, *Integrity* will seek to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and deed, among themselves and toward all men. It may legitimately be inferred that the issuance of a publication with such a purpose implies that there is division,

impurity and dishonesty to be overcome. . . .

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

We believe that the [restoration principles of the supreme authority of the Bible and the right of individual interpretation] are worth defending. We believe further that the taproot of division is departure from them. . . .

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

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

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

We must let you decide whether we have maintained these objectives. But we believe they are still valid. —HGL.

But no matter how spiritual a woman is, she may be obliged to keep silent around carnal men in the congregation lest she *seem* to have some authority over them.* Notwithstanding all the freedom from bondage Christ has afforded her, she can wait patiently until her brothers grow stronger "in the Lord" and can accept her even as the Lord himself accepts her—without fear of diminishing their position and power. And if her brothers never allow themselves this liberty of growth in communion with the Father in perfect freedom, then she still has her own communion with the Lord to sustain her, now and forever.

Hence the spiritual woman might well consider the option of silence in her association with carnal believers. The matter of receiving all things pertaining to life and godliness is, after all, a very individual experience. It cannot just be explained with human words and handed over to someone else verbatim. It would be worthless that way, and even misunderstood and detrimental. One could block the work of the Holy Spirit by supporting someone else's preconceived notions. Can you possibly hope to accomplish in a few words what God has taken years to do in you? We may take the wonderful example of Mary, the mother of our Lord, who kept sayings in her heart and pondered them. Only a real person of God has his blessing at her disposal and can endure such discipline so beautifully. This is living *the life*.

Inasmuch as a woman's merely speaking aloud in church does not necessarily mean or imply that she is exercising authority over men, what is involved in the injunction of silence? If a woman should speak from a heart which *does* realize and reflect the Lord within her, then this would shame any men present who should have likewise grown in

*Nee (*The Spiritual Man*, Vol. I, pp. 84-94) gives detailed description of the carnal believer. Being self-centered and easily offended are among the characteristics.

the Lord but had not. The Lord would be speaking through her, but the brother who was steeped in carnality could only perceive the message as coming from a woman, which would threaten his self-image. His ego would be at stake. If he listened with a carnal mind, he could not discern a statement from the Lord, but only a woman speaking with authority.

Although the Lord still teaches as one with authority, whether through men, women, or, as in Balaam's case, donkeys, it may spare us some grief to remember that the pearls of truth which we have gleaned through many trials will, if shared too generously, be trampled in the stinking hog wallow of carnality; and foes from the mud of human intellect will be incited to tear at us through rebuttals from carnal pulpits and other avenues of attack. Some of the beauty of our pearls is always marred by those unable to appreciate them. So adorn yourself with them for your Lord, who sees, knows, and appreciates (Mt. 7:6).

Being one in Christ transcends the order of creation, everything carnal, and even His own laws. Even Paul says that "in the Lord" men and women are not separate or independent. He uses the expression "in the Lord" several times in his letters to show that our behavioral relations with carnal believers are different from those with spiritual believers. Both men and women who have received, and *are receiving*, the things of Christ will so recognize each other and can have, even here and now, the wonderful fellowship and oneness in the body of the Lord to which he has called them. Paul asserts: ". . . there is not male and female, for you *are* all ONE IN CHRIST JESUS" (Gal. 3:28).

Lord, hasten the day when all our men and all our women will know assuredly that they have been set free for freedom in thee, when they will act upon that knowledge and never again fear what mankind can do to them. So be it! □