

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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Spirit. This view, by the way, fits much better with the "maxim of both the natural and spiritual worlds that 'like produces like'" which Brother Jones mentions. If one wants to generate a spiritual man best start with spirit. That which is born of spirit is spirit.

As 1 Cor. 12:12-13 shows, there is a functioning of the Spirit in baptism. Yet it does not follow that 1) since baptism is in water, and 2) water is used in washing, that therefore all washing is baptism, and (therefore) "washing of regeneration" is equivalent to "baptism of regeneration." I suppose some have interpreted a meaning which, if Paul had intended, would be better expressed as "regeneration of washing." Rather, I think that the statement is affirming that both the "initial experience" (regeneration) and the continuation (renewal) are accomplished by the pouring of the Holy Spirit over us: spiritual catharsis is in God's flow.

I agree with the direction in which the article would point us. "Indeed, church

renewal and the presence of God's Spirit seem inseparable." Let's notice, however, that if we slight the birthing of the Holy Spirit we may foster situations where we teach the daily renewal of that which was stillborn; dead men, by the way, will not seek the refreshment of (living) water, completely frustrating the renewal efforts. It is a horror to recall that "concerted voices threatened any who dared acknowledge too strong leanings on the spirit of God as the very source of spiritual birth and Christlike character." Titus 3:4-5 alone affirms such about the Spirit.

Maybe baptism-at-the-heart-of-every-Christian-notion is a badge that I had better flash to be identified as a member in good existentially-validated standing with the movement. I should like to resist that. Baptism is well enough attested in scripture. I see no reason to think it is in Titus 3:4-5.

KEN SEIDERS
Pontiac, Michigan

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Ice and Baptism

When I set forth under the Great Commission some thirty years ago, my battle gear consisted of three books: A King James Bible with brief concordance, a slender volume of sermon outlines, and a small paperback entitled *Snappy Stories That Preachers Tell*. I don't remember who recommended the last one, or why I thought I needed it, but it probably suggests something about my concept of the ministry.

This all came back to me last week when I baptized a friend in a lake on a cold, rainy day. One of the snappy stories in that book was about a preacher who, no matter what text he started with, always ended up preaching on baptism. The congregation, weary of his one-track homiletics, sought a diplomatic way to get him into another subject. They were sure they had it when they asked him to preach on the prophecy, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." The next Sunday he read the text and began: "Swords are made out of steel. Axes are also made out of steel. In the winter we use axes to cut the ice on the pond so we can baptize." And off he went again.

One is tempted to guess that we would have fewer baptisms if we had to cut through the ice in order to baptize, but I am not at all sure that would be the case. It is hard to get excited about a fellowship which requires no particular commitment, and a difficult baptism might make the act itself seem more important, and also imply that membership in the body is worth something because it costs something.

I am not suggesting that we should rip out the baptistry and go to the lake to baptize. The arduous tasks we impose on ourselves must make sense. But we must make sure that the atmosphere of our life together does not leave us with a sense of uselessness. Look around you. The congregations people really love are those which apparently have high expectations of their members.

—HGL

Extinction or Distinction?

CHARLES R. GRESHAM

Grayson, Kentucky

In a recent term paper, one of our Bible College students (wishing to emphasize the fact that the church must reproduce itself) wrote: "We're just one generation away from distinction." Whether we can classify this error as a "Freudian slip" (one of those "psycho-pathologies of everyday life") may be questioned, but its hidden truth is so very apparent.

Granted, the community of Christian faith known commonly as the church is just one generation away from extinction. This should always give us high motivation for mission, for witness and work. Yet, that same community is just one generation away from distinction as well! What is true negatively is true positively. If we don't reproduce ourselves we fail, not only our Lord and ourselves, but the succeeding generation; but we have every resource to succeed gloriously and produce the most distinctive generation in all the history of Christendom.

What generation has ever had the possibilities of rapid communication that we have? What generation has ever had the technological skills that are present in our own (e.g., computer technology applied to Bible translation and printing has speeded up our ability to put the Word of Truth in the language of millions of people)? What generation has explored the depths of the human mind and soul like ours,

providing rich insights into effective teaching, learning and interpersonal relationship — these (and others) are the resources that could make, if properly used, our generation and the rising generation the "generations of distinction."

The only thing keeping us from becoming and producing a "generation of distinction" is failure of nerve. Our confidence in the living God's ability to undergird us, and our confidence in the revelation He has given His purpose, have been undermined. We are not willing to believe genuinely in Him or in what He has said, so we languish in mediocrity and half-heartedness.

Trusting in Him, letting His Word of Truth guide us; relying upon His Spirit to fill us for powerful witness and ministry; we may look forward confidently and become what is genuinely possible — a distinctive generation. We will then become a generation of "Great Hearts" of whom John Oxenham writes:

Where are you going Great-Heart?
"To break down old dividing lines;
To carry out my Lord's design;
To build again His broken shrines."
Then God go with you, Great-Heart!

Where are you going Great-Heart?
"To set all burdened peoples free;
To win for all God's liberty;
To 'stablish His Sweet Sovereignty."
God goes with you, Great Heart!

Hallowed Heresy

HOY LEDBETTER

Since an editor needs to keep in touch with his readers' thinking and the material to which they are exposed, I try to read a fairly broad selection of religious papers each month. In so doing I have noticed that even the most sectarian journals contain frequent articles on the theme of unity among believers. This is not surprising, because the Biblical stress on the subject is too strong to be ignored, and also because our humane disposition cries out in sympathy with the broken hearts that result from congregational division. Such concern is good. But unfortunately on this journalistic estate one often finds the sectarian wolf posing as an ecumenical lamb, blaming division on everyone else, and offering a remedy for it which virtually sanctifies the party spirit.

Since God did not intend for his church to be divided, and yet we are divided, it evidently follows that some of us are misreading his directions with regard to the communion of the saints, and our misinterpretations of Scripture dispute the apostolic claim that he is not a God of disorder but of peace. Let us take as an example of distortion a passage which is often called upon to support the assertion that division will ensue when brethren will not agree on the various issues, Amos 3:3 (KJV): "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" But "agreed" on what? That the text does not have in mind the so-called issues is made clear by practically any other version we may

examine. The New International Version is a good illustration of how the real point of the passage may be made obvious: "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"

If this verse, which deals with the covenant relationship, is applicable to the question of unity among believers, it emphasizes the importance of mutual commitment rather than suggesting that one's position must be abandoned if it conflicts with the presuppositions and precepts of another. All history warns us that if we must wait until we all agree on "the issues" before we can be united, we might as well be waiting for Godot. It will be a long wait, for unity has never been achieved on that basis, and no doubt never will be.

But it may be argued that the one who uses Amos 3:3 understands that the passage does not actually deal with unity among believers in Christ, and that it is only used to express the sense of other passages. If that is so, then why are the other passages not used instead? As a matter of fact, there are no passages which either state or imply that uniformity of conviction is a prerequisite to unity, or, on the other hand, that a lack of such uniformity causes division.

Ignorance of God's Word

It is argued that division is caused by ignorance of God's word, by brethren being unable to distinguish truth from error. That sounds innocent enough, but the problem here is that sectarians

tend to test the truth by the peculiarities of their particular fellowship, and among them knowing the truth is the same thing as being able to defend their right to exist as a separate denomination (although they may avoid that term). Knowing the truth in this sense is a major cause of division.

Given this disclaimer, we must agree that ignorance of God's word indirectly contributes to a great deal of division. If we knew the Biblical directions on how to respond to our brethren when differences arise; if we came to terms with what the Bible says about how the early church solved — or failed to solve — problems of fraternal friction; if we faced up to the Scriptural condemnation of the party spirit, selfish ambition, discord and dissension; and if our conviction by the word was sufficient to rule out the gross ethical errors which are usually involved in the separation of Christians; then our knowledge of God's word would indeed be a powerful corrective to alienation.

This knowledge, however, is quite different from the ability to pass a loyalty test which concentrates on one's grasp of and commitment to the "right" side of a set of controversial questions. The Bible indicates that those who *cause* division very often hold the correct position with regard to the point of dispute. Their trouble is that they do not also hold the right position regarding their brethren. And it is surely not insignificant that some of our worst divisions came at a time when we took great pride in our knowledge of the Bible.

Failure to Preach the Word

Division is also attributed to a failure to preach the word. Bold, hard-hitting preaching is urged in opposition to the

frightening "uncertain sounds" and "broadminded" sermons which are held to be killing us. That we will have to answer for a great deal of cowardice in the pulpit is hard to deny. Although we try to take seriously Paul's warning against tickling itching ears, we still have to face people in power who have itchy trigger fingers and stand ready to blow us away if "the good of the church" so decrees. In such a context preaching must necessarily be bold, for it is essential that the choice of sermons be based on the congregation's need, and not on the preacher's fears. The Lord's truth-teller must be prepared to speak in season and out of season (whether the time is right or not); he is not at liberty to "wait until the brethren are ready for it."

However, this Christian candor may become an excuse for enforcing factiousness. Preachers (who will be judged with greater strictness) need to remember that silence can be a virtue, a virtue which zeal for uniform convictions may easily overlook. Paul requires us to "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Rom. 14:1). There comes a time when, notwithstanding differences within the congregation, the preacher (and everyone else) must SHUT UP! Those who think preaching should always be "hard hitting" will be uncomfortable with this passage, but it is of great importance in maintaining the unity which the Spirit inspires.

As Paul well knew, obsession with convincing everyone in the fellowship with respect to "disputable matters" will inevitably lead to division. On the other hand, just what is there about bearing down on "drinkers, dancers, gamblers and adulterers" (one writer's prescription for division) that will bind

the church together? Those who seek unity on this basis can claim success only after they have driven off a substantial portion of the congregation. And although brethren sometimes brag about committing this sin, it does not lead to the unity which Christ produced and preached.

The preaching of Christ is a uniting message. Listen to Ephesian 2:16-17: "By his death on the cross Christ destroyed their enmity; by means of the cross he united both races into one body, and brought them back to God. So Christ came and preached the Good News of peace to all . . ." The preaching that will cure division is that which concentrates on what Jesus did on the cross, how he destroyed enmity, united the races, and declared the war is over.

Spirit of Compromise

The spirit of compromise is also given much credit as a cause of division. However, the word compromise is often loaded with more disjunctive freight than it can possibly carry. It is true that Paul, speaking of the false brethren at Jerusalem who intended to make slaves of the liberated Christians, asserted, "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (Gal. 2:5). And this text is not unrelated to unity, since the subversive brethren were in both theory and practice denying the integrating work of the cross and the Good News of peace which Christ preached. But one startling fact we need to remember is that the more restrictive disciples (the conservatives) were the troublemakers and the ones with whom Paul would not compromise. Furthermore, at one point they could claim

Peter and even Barnabas.

This is why at Antioch Paul opposed Peter to the face, for before certain men came from James (i.e., the conservatives from Jerusalem) he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they arrived, "he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." The other Jews and "even Barnabas" were led astray by this hypocrisy, so Paul, seeing "that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel," rebuked Peter "in front of them all."

Peter abandoned the truth of the gospel when he gave in to brethren who very well may have boasted of their unwillingness to compromise. These factionists threatened the unity of the church both at Jerusalem and Antioch, and they illustrate how extremely dangerous fear of compromise can be. And let us restorationists be warned by what happened at Antioch that one of our flaws is that we are already too much like the early church. To cite one instance, when we have revived the reprehensible exclusionism of the circumcision party, we have overdone restorationism. However, we may rejoice in the fact that the early church's vigorous ecumenical outlook, which we often overlook, prevailed, and the apostles, except for Peter's brief aberration, never failed to resist attempts to divide the church by such sectarians as the circumcision group.

If uniformity of conviction is essential to unity, as some insist, then Paul surely set us a bad example when he "became all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22). But the truth is that Paul was so devoted to his mission of saving everyone that he would stand aloof from none except the one who denied the fundamental truths,

an issue over which our churches almost never divide. The truth of the gospel was to him just what the term means: the Good News that Jesus has ended the war and we can therefore enjoy the

peace. He was not concerned with establishing the accuracy of various positions on "disputable matters" at the expense of separating brother from brother. And neither should we be.

Christ for the City

TOM LANE

Cincinnati, Ohio

The city is the symbol of modern American society, for it is that society's substance. Ours is a highly urbanized nation; over three-fourths of America's population lives in metropolitan areas. People come together in cities for the jobs, learning and entertainment opportunities these centers of business and industry, culture and intellectual life provide.

But cities are also centers of dissatisfaction and despair. Sociologists, community planners, and poets have decried the dehumanizing character of the mass urban environment. Cities are centers both of economic activity and of abject poverty, of sparkling art and culture and of moral depravity. In the midst of the impersonal urban crowd, there is isolation, loneliness and fear. In the bustle of the working day and the frenzy of the urban night life, many people feel a boredom originating at a deeper level of their being. Despite their seeming purposeful involvement in the myriad activities the city offers, many people view their lives as bleak, empty, pointless.

There is a spiritual vacuum which lies at the heart of the loneliness and frustration so often found in the city. For the city is often the center of a

materialistic, agnostic culture that has rejected God and the meaning and fulfillment that a person can gain from a vital relationship with Him. The city may be transformed if the lives of the people who are the city are transformed by an ongoing experience with Christ.

Christ answers the needs of the people in the city. Let's see how this is so.

Christ Gives Love

Isolation, loneliness, and fear of one's fellow men run rampant in the city. In the crowds of people that make up the city people often get lost in the crowd.

Why is this? Ironically, it is sometimes the very crowdedness of the city which prevents people from coming together in meaningful and intimate communication with one another. The city is full of noise, traffic, people coming and going. The crowdedness of the city affords little privacy for that relaxed, solitary reflection in which a person thinks through his life and his relationships, and so develops that strength of character which makes it possible for him to approach others on a deep level.

It is in that occasional solitude that a person learns to understand others. Thus many people in the city cannot give of themselves to others, for they have no self to give.

In a fast-paced society such as ours, so many people cross our path daily that it is hopeless for us to venture real concern and intimacy toward them all. Sociologist Georg Simmel noted the impracticability of the urban resident responding emotionally to everyone he encounters in his crowded environment. The mailman, the bank teller, our fellow employees, all touch our lives for such short duration that there is little chance to get to really know them. So we become accustomed to dealing with people in terms of their roles rather than as individuals who have needs and feelings like our own.

. . . other aspects

There are other aspects of city life which make for estrangement between people. The city is often a place where people of diverse life styles and ethnic origins must work and live near one another. Here prejudice leads to intolerance, discrimination, sometimes to open violence. This in turn only further hardens the walls between people in the city.

While cities are centers of business and commerce, they are also notorious for their contrasting pockets of poverty. In the inner city are found the uneducated and unskilled would-be laborers, the defeated, the alcoholics and drug addicts, and the weak and powerless — such as the aged who, living on meager pensions and social security, cannot afford to live elsewhere, offering easy prey to the predators of the streets. The poverty and consequent despair of inner

city life often finds expression in crimes of destruction and violence against fellow man. These outbursts of frustration or rage in turn create an atmosphere of distrust in the city; people fear their neighbor or the stranger passing by on the street, who may turn on them without warning, brandishing a knife or club. Thus inner frustration and alienation lead to acts of violence, which result only in an even greater lengthening of the distance between persons, only to even greater loneliness and fear in the city.

The fear, the isolation, the rancor, the loneliness — you can see it in the city. You can see it in the head-bowed posture of the old men sitting idly on the sidewalk benches downtown. You can read it in the expression of insecurity on the faces of the commuters as they turn their heads away, afraid you'll sit by them, as you walk down the aisle seeking a seat on the bus. You can read it in the dejected manner of your co-worker whose partying the night before has left him with nothing and no one from whom to draw strength for another routine morning at the office. You can read it in the crime accounts and suicide reports in the newspaper.

Christ answers the problem of alienation and loneliness in modern society. Christ answers man's essential need to relate to his fellow men. For Christ gives us love, and He gives us each other.

Christ calls us to exercise a daring, persevering love toward our fellow Christians, and toward all men. This love leads us to make ourselves open to others, seeking by our patient example to draw others with us into that deep involvement in one another's lives which the Bible calls fellowship. Fellow-

ship means we develop sensitivity to one another's needs, and offer encouragement to ease one another's burdens. Fellowship means we rejoice at one another's triumphs, and rejoice in one another's unique personalities as well. It means making ourselves accessible to one another, open to being built up, and, inevitably, vulnerable to being hurt; but if we truly love one another, if we hurt one another it will be by accident rather than malicious intent, and the hurt will readily disappear in the interplay of apology and forgiveness. Fellowship means taking time from the busy pace of our lives to be with each other; it also means taking time to be by ourselves in order to think through our relationships. Fellowship is the deep, rewarding experience Christians are to have of one another — even in the city.

. . . a formidable force

But can this appealing life style, fellowship, actually work in the city? The kind of love that tends toward fellowship, we find, is a formidable force that tears down the walls of formality, distrust and enmity that make the city a lonely place.

The love Christ gives us teaches us to view all people with whom we come in contact — even those who pass so quickly across the periphery of our lives in performance of their roles — as real people. Even though we have not the opportunity to get to know deeply everyone we meet, love leads us to those small acts of thoughtful attention so neglected in the city: the wave at the postman, the "thank you" to the store cashier, the visit paid the neighbor in the hospital. In love we seek to share at length and in depth with those we can;

and we spread our love in small ways to many as well.

Prejudice and pride build walls between people in the city. But in Christ these walls are removed. In the one body of Christ the distinctions of class and status which men perceive as barriers to sharing are dissolved (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Urban rich and urban poor, university professor and stock-room clerk, black and white, old and young, social activist and political conservative, hippie and straight, are all one in common allegiance to Christ. Christian love perceives this essential unity of diverse people in Christ. Love by its very nature leaves no room for us to feel superiority or disdain toward those who differ from us. Love results in tolerance and a striving for understanding. Love emphasizes what we have in common; and what we have in common is far more important than any of our differences, for we have in common Christ.

In the urban slums, the desperation of life under poverty sometimes so builds up in the hearts of people that they strike out in damaging words and unkind or even violent acts against those whom they see as their oppressors. Sometimes they strike out at random against whoever happens to cross their path, simply to release the tension. For these people, love brings healing. Love teaches us not to strike out in anger, but to seek reconciliation with our fellow men. And within the fellowship of the church, love leads those who are materially fortunate to share both their goods and their job skills and job-hunting skills with the poor, thereby helping the poor out of the economic deprivation that breeds frustration, anger, and despair.

In these several ways love overcomes

the factors that make for alienation in the urban environment. In the exercise of an adventurous, tough-minded, working love we can create fellowship in the midst of the city.

Christ Gives Meaning

Boredom born of meaninglessness is a bane of life in the city, that is, of life lived in terms of contemporary agnostic culture. A few years ago, journalist Alvin Toffler produced a book, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), in which he speculated that the tremendous technological and social innovations rapidly inundating American culture might be more than the mind could handle, causing a crisis of cultural adjustment. But one professor of sociology at the University of Cincinnati recently countered, "Our problem today is not that people's lives are changing so rapidly they've gone into shock, the problem is that people's lives are incredibly boring." And the students in his class, men and women at the vanguard of today's social change and voracious consumers of all the entertainments our culture provides, shook their heads in agreement: yes, our lives are boring.

The city is alive with activity. The city is a center of work, of business and industry, of learning and art. The city is a center of entertainment. This, to many people, is one of its most attractive aspects. Here are restaurants, bars, discos, theatres, and pinball palaces. There is always something to do in the city. There are parks to visit, concerts to attend, craft exhibitions to browse. We expect to find busy people in the city, and we do: people that engross themselves with seeming purpose in their jobs and careers, then

fill their time away from work with all the activity they can find.

And yet, these busy people sometimes confide that boredom is one of their greatest enemies. The very pace of their lives does not result from a sense of meaning and motivation, but is a frantic attempt to dispel the boredom that seems to become only more intense with each new effort to disguise it. Their activity is not confident, contented self-expression, but searching restlessness.

Why do activity and entertainment thus leave many people empty? The problem seems to be that there is no purpose, no undergirding meaning to this activity. It is reflex, a mechanical reaction unrooted in any deep personal values. Nor can activity be its own value; work for the sake of work, or entertainment for the mere sake of sensual self-gratification, does not ultimately satisfy. The real cause of much of the boredom that characterizes modern life is the feeling that whatever one is or does is fundamentally meaningless.

For the educated and "cultured" residents of the city, this sense of the essential vanity of life is a carefully defined philosophy. In college classrooms, and in the coffee houses surrounding the universities in the city, a worldview which consciously acknowledges meaninglessness and despair is the consensus. The widely-accepted contemporary behavioristic psychology regards man as an animal that reacts on a mindless, instinctive level to environmental stimuli. There is no mind, therefore no meaning. The existential philosophy currently popular in other academic circles, in contrast to this view, does seek to return a measure of autonomy and dignity to man, declaring that, while life has no

ultimate or transcendent meaning, a man can manufacture his own meaning to existence by the choices he makes and the great courage with which he confronts life's very vanity. Existentialism puts man back into the impossible position of trying by action itself to give meaning to his activities. Jean-Paul Sartre, late dean of the existentialist school of thought, himself once admitted that this striving in lieu of meaning leaves man still only a "useless passion."

For the less culture-concerned "common man," the meaninglessness of life in the city is less a considered personal philosophy than a dimly defined but threatening feeling that something is missing from life. Activity is drudgery, self-gratification is hollow, and life itself appears a sham, death always looming to cast a shadow of futility over work and rest and recreation. The recognition that death finally awaits us makes even the most savory personal accomplishments seem pointless.

... life is a gift

But God gives meaning to life's activities. Conducted in the context of a vital relationship with Him, work and play take on worth.

God is the Creator, the source of life, and, hence, of life's meaning. Our lives have meaning because of the fact that life is a gift from a loving Creator. Think about this for a moment: A gift from an earthly friend has value for us because of the giver. Likewise our lives have value, for life is God's gift of love.

When we recognize ourselves as gift-creatures of God, we gain a whole new attitude about our life. Our jobs we learn to see as an employment in

stewardship of the earth, God's handiwork and the ultimate base of all economic activity, which yields forth provision for our material needs. Recreation we come to see as a bounty from the God who endows His creatures with the sensual capacity for pleasure. Whatever we do, whether busy or resting, working at our jobs or going out for an evening's entertainment downtown, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father for the gift of life, and the gift of Himself. And we revel in the knowledge that what we think and feel and do and are, is not a passing vanity, for we have the promise of *eternal* life, of eternal significance.

We see meaning to our lives, because we know that we are a gift of love from God to ourselves. Moreover, we have the meaning that comes from mission. Christ gives us a challenging work to perform, a purpose to serve that is greater than ourselves. Our mission is to introduce others, by our words and by our personal example of purposeful living, to the Creator as Redeemer. We appreciate and enjoy our lives as a gift from God, and we share with others the message of Christ's gift of salvation, that they, too, might know God and come to recognize their lives as a meaningful, worthwhile gift from Him.

Lonely voices cry in the city — they cry out for love, they cry out for reason and meaning to their existence. Christ answers the cry, teaching love where once isolation and fear and enmity held sway. Christ answers the cry, giving meaning and purpose where once was only emptiness. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life in abundance." This is the church's message to the city. This is His message to us. □

Evil in the Christian's Life

JOHN J. WRIGHT

Pasadena, Texas

It would be nice if every day offered us sunshine and roses. If our feet leaped from mountain top to mountain top, ignoring the valleys below. If our children were all born to have straight teeth and no cavities. If our check book always balanced, extending all the way to the end of the month. If no sickness ever found our door, no sorrow, no sadness, no tragedy. If, as long as we walked with Jesus, the sun would never leave our side and the wind would always be at our back.

Sometimes we may convince ourselves that if we could think positively enough, if we were *really* living right, if we just had *enough* faith, that's the way it would be. However, at such times of delusion, we forget that *even* Jesus had his Gethsemane.

The truth is that most of us have our valleys of life. We experience "down days," "blue Mondays," days of discouragement. We have our times of sickness or sorrow. We have times when we are torn with decision, or are lonely, or defeated, without knowing where to turn or what to do.

The cause for our "valley" *may* be spiritual weakness or hunger, insufficient faith. Or, the cause *may* be that circumstances of life have just beaten us low. To ask the question whether the valley "ought" to be there or not is a vain exercise, irrelevant to the cure. The point is: It *is* there! Our only question is, "How are we to live through it and triumph over it?" Beating ourselves over the head with a

"guilt trip" — telling ourselves how "bad" we are for being discouraged — is not the remedy either. That only drives us deeper into the pits.

Demanding of ourselves "a perfect faith" is every bit as futile as demanding of ourselves a perfect life or perfect theology. All three, by their very nature, reject the blood of Christ as man's redemption. One seeks to rely on its goodness of works. One puts its trust in its perfection of doctrine. One places its confidence in the superiority of its faith. Each detracts from the glory of God.

I am intrigued by the multitudes who have discarded a religious system which seeks to merit salvation through the amassing of "good works" or through the perfection of doctrine. I am further intrigued to see scores of *that* number go on to invest their trust in a *different kind* of merit system — one which seeks to earn points with God through a superior faith. The old system relied upon one's ability to live perfectly enough to gain salvation or to think accurately enough. The new system relies upon one's own ability to believe perfectly enough to be saved. Both focus their trust upon the ability of SELF rather than on the sufficiency of Christ.

Aspiring to have a "perfect faith" certainly has its proper and productive place in the life of the Christian as he puts forth an effort to grow. But then, so does the aspiration for a "perfect life" and a "perfect theology."

However, *demanding of ourselves* any of these, or *relying upon* any of them, only drives genuine peace and assurance that much farther from our door.

Somewhere *amidst* the pain, doubt, sorrow, and discouragement, we must find the hand of God. And grasp it tightly. And be reminded again that we don't have to be on a spiritual mountain top for God to see us and be near. He stands there beside us in our

peril and gloom. We may not always feel his presence, but he's there, waiting for us to allow him to lead us through the miry, tangled mess we find ourselves in, to a more hopeful tomorrow.

Christianity is *not* a talisman to insure us against the intrusion of trouble into our lives. Christianity is a relationship with God. And in whatever trouble the world deals out to us, *He* stands beside us, to lead us home!

Unbind Him and Let Him Go!

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"Lazarus, come forth," said Jesus loudly as He stood near the entrance to the tomb which held the body of His friend. Such audacity! Had Jesus responded sooner to the urgent request of the dying man's sisters, Mary and Martha, who had asked Him to come and restore their terminally ill brother to health, Lazarus' life might have been saved. But when he received the message, Jesus felt no great urgency to rush to His friend's bedside, so He stayed where He was for two more days before going. Then upon arrival at Bethany, He was greeted first by Martha then Mary and a band of Jewish friends appropriately in a state of mourning. Lazarus, now deceased, had been duly wrapped in the grave cloths according to the Jewish custom and tradition and placed in the tomb four days before Jesus' arrival. It was absurd to think that even Jesus could restore a man to life who had been dead for such a period of time.

"Lazarus, come forth!" Jesus' words,

loud and authoritative, penetrated the domain of death, and the dead man received new life and came out of the grave. Jesus, "the way, the truth and the life," had done His work. Eyewitnesses could not dispute the fact that He had given life to a man declared dead. They may not have understood all the ramifications of what this implied. They were probably quite unaware of the fact that only Jesus could restore a man to life because only He possesses the God-given power to give eternal life. But this much they could verify: the man declared dead and buried four days earlier stood at the entrance of his tomb and was obviously alive, although still bound hand and foot by the grave cloths.

Jesus restored Lazarus to life, but there was one thing He did not do; He delegated one task to the family and friends. Lazarus, even though he had been called from the tomb, was not completely free, but was fettered by the traditional grave cloths, and the task of

setting him free was left to those who witnessed his resurrection. In freeing him from the restraints, they had to believe that there was indeed new life in him which freed him from the grave. They had to touch him and feel and come into contact with the life which Jesus Christ had restored to him.

"Unbind him and let him go" were the words Jesus spoke as Lazarus appeared at the entrance of the tomb which had held him prisoner for four days. Is it possible that Jesus gives that same command to us today as we stand by our brothers and sisters who by the grace of God have been restored to new life in Christ, but who remain bound by tradition, legalism and custom, which conform them to some image of religiosity, but restrains them from experiencing true freedom in Jesus Christ?

"Unbind him and let him go." Have we ourselves been released from the entanglements which barely allow us to hobble a few feet from the rock-like sepulchers of our own minds? When Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," He wasn't referring primarily to the physical life, though that may be necessary. The word He used for life was the Greek word *psyche*, which means mind. Do we really believe that if the Son sets us free we are free indeed? If so, are we so free and so completely immersed in His love that we willingly lay down our minds — our ego, our thoughts, and yes, even our cherished traditions and prejudices which are so vital to us? If we are free in Christ, then we are free to love others as He loves us. If we have this freedom in His all-encompassing love, then and only then can we really unbind the grave cloths which entangle our

brothers and sisters and hold them back from experiencing the essence of freedom in Jesus Christ.

"Unbind him and let him go." Dare we really do that? Is there a place in our fellowship for one who, though once bound by a crippled body and/or spirit finds healing and begins "walking and leaping and praising God"? Would such a brother or sister be allowed that freedom of expression in Christ, or would he face icy stares from the fellowship, followed by an elder approaching him with, "We don't do that here"? Are we free enough to have fellowship with those who feel a freedom in Christ to use the instrument in worship, or would we avoid them as brothers in error? Likewise, are we free enough to have fellowship with our brothers who prefer not to use the instrument in worship, praising God that we can "make a joyful noise," regardless of how discordant that "noise" may seem? Dare we really unbind our brothers and sisters and let them go? Dare we really unbind ourselves and them from the entanglements we have so carefully placed upon ourselves and let each other go, as Jesus ordered Lazarus' friends to do?

"Unbind him and let him go." A frightening thought? Is it ever! It is reported in John 1:32 that the Spirit descended as a dove from heaven and remained on Christ. Is it possible that we have taken that Spirit and put it in a cage to behold its beauty, and in so doing, placed it in the unnatural state of captivity? What would happen if, being unbound, we allowed the Spirit to be freely expressed in our lives? What would happen? Chaos? Undoubtedly it would be chaotic as we define the term. But destructive chaos? No, for if it is indeed the Spirit being manifested,

we would discover the truth of Paul's statement, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace."

"Unbind him and let him go." What a challenge! Living in Christ as new creations (1 Cor. 5:17), we are to be renewed by the putting on of our new nature (Eph. 4:22-24), knowing that if the Son sets us free, we are free indeed (John 8:36). With this freedom, we have the confidence to boldly enter the

throne room of the King as heirs to His Kingdom. But in so doing, as we fellowship with our brothers and sisters who likewise have been unbound, we must consider ways to encourage them and stir them up to freely express love and good works (Heb. 10:19-25).

The tomb is empty. The man once dead has new life. Let us begin now to "unbind him and let him go." □

To Abner Jones

"Elder Jones commenced preaching in September, 1801... From the first he announced his determination to stand alone, and acknowledge the authority of no church or set of men. He and about a dozen others, laymen, and residents of Lyndon, covenanted together in church form, and called themselves CHRISTIANS: rejecting all party and sectional names, and leaving each other free to cherish such speculative views of theology as the scriptures might plainly seem to them to teach."
A.D. Jones

O Bright New England Star of bygone days!
O Blazing Star in far Vermont's dark night!
Least known of those who helped to chart our way
From creedal dark to Freedom's Holy Light!
O Prophet bold, who herald the Gospel true
Through all that far-flung land of snow and birch —
The ages yet shall come to honor you
Who first restored the ancient Christian Church.

O sleep in peace! In far New Hampshire rest!
Your work, though lost awhile, was not in vain.
New stars today from out the South and West,
Arise to fill your Northern skies again.
And all our Eastern hills are lighted by
The Gospel torch which first you lifted high.

— Don Reece

LETTERS

I have a comment on the interpretation of Titus 3:4-5 made by Joseph F. Jones in the April-May issue. I see in the passage no reason to draw an identity of "washing" to baptism. Notice how the symbolism

develops in the verse. First Paul mentions "the washing" and later links this concept to the Holy Spirit by using the idea of "pouring out." I take it that the washing was done with that which was poured out, the Holy