

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## Touching Thomas (John 20:1-19)

ELTON D. HIGGS

*March/April 1988 Reprint*

Why should I have touched His wounds,  
Who asked a measure more than those  
Who only saw, and made His peace their joy?  
Still others, seeing not, will have *His* touch.  
And I, who walked with Him and shared  
A thousand days of common ground,  
But ran away when He was taken off  
To bear the wounds I now have touched—  
These wretched hands have felt the anguish of  
The wounds He took for me.

Little did I know that what I asked  
Was sharing in His pain.  
Yet in His love for me, He let  
My probing hands renew the desecrating  
Thrust of nails and spear;  
And now I know that all along  
His sufferance of our selfish, grasping fingers,  
Seeking only fleshly touch,  
Was of a piece with baring all His wounds.  
How far He had to reach  
To let me touch His side!

---

Elton D. Higgs, a graduate of Abilene Christian University, is a professor of Medieval Literature at University of Michigan, Dearborn. As a member of the *Integrity* board, Elton has dedicated time and skills to this magazine's ministry for nearly 15 years.

---

# Integrity

---

---

**Editorial: An *Integrity* Sampler**

**Guest Editorial**

Leroy Garrett

**The God in Chains**

W. Carl Ketcherside

**What We Have to Offer**

Hoy Ledbetter

**Dry Bread and Cold Potatoes**

Laquita M. Higgs

**Freedom for Men and Women**

J. Bruce Kilmer

**Never Go to Bed Angry**

Joseph F. Jones

**Touching Thomas**

Elton Higgs

Sept./Oct. 1992  
Vol. 23, No. 5

### Editors

Diane G.H. Kilmer  
J. Bruce Kilmer

### Layout Editor

Natalie Randall

### Integrity Address

4051 S. Lincoln Road  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

### Board of Directors

Sidney R. Bonvallet  
Wayne A. Bonvallet  
Brant Lee Doty  
Elton D. Higgs  
Laquita M. Higgs  
Joseph F. Jones  
Diane G.H. Kilmer  
J. Bruce Kilmer  
Curtis Lloyd  
Curtis D. McClane  
Foy Palmer  
Henrietta C. Palmer  
William Palmer  
Amos Ponder  
Karl W. Randall  
Natalie Randall  
Jan Van Horn  
John Van Horn

### Editorial Advisor

Hoy Ledbetter

### Subscriptions

are by written request.  
There is no subscription charge, but we depend on your contributions, which are tax deductible.

### Manuscripts

written exclusively for INTEGRITY are welcomed.

### Back Issues

Available from  
1269 Pickwick Place  
Flint, MI 48507

## An Integrity Sampler

This *Integrity* "Sampler" is just that — an issue of representative articles this journal has published over the last 10 years. The occasion for this "Sampler" is a one-time opportunity given to us by Leroy Garrett, editor of *Restoration Review*, to send each of his subscribers one introductory issue of *Integrity*. Leroy Garrett, who has served in all three major branches of the Stone-Campbell movement as scholar, preacher, author, and fellow sojourner, is bringing the *Restoration Review* ministry to a close at the end of this year. We are honored that Brother Garrett has very graciously allowed us to offer his readers a taste of *Integrity*.

*Integrity* articles usually fit into one of three categories: 1) those of particular interest to Stone-Campbell heirs; 2) writing that encourages individual spiritual growth; and 3) articles that encourage maturity in the church, including promotion of unity among believers. This journal is a magazine of the people — writers and readers include men and women of various occupations, backgrounds, and experiences. We encourage our readers to submit articles and suggest topics and authors. *Integrity* strives to be a written, open forum where differing views can be expressed in love, in hopes of refining our knowledge of Jesus. About 20 people are members of our working editorial board. A \$10 annual donation from each subscriber pays for printing and mailing expenses, and is requested by an annual Fall Fund Appeal letter.

To those of you who are already long-term *Integrity* readers: we think you'll enjoy rereading these freshly revised reprints, which have proven to be thoughtful, challenging articles to many. After you have read them, why not pass this issue on for someone else to sample? We hope all readers find the flavor of this journal to be spiced with life — for the goal of this writing ministry is to be "the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (II Cor. 2:15).

Diane and Bruce Kilmer  
Co-Editors

### A Recommendation for *Integrity*

For forty years I have engaged in what I like to call *personal* journalism. I thus viewed my journal *Restoration Review* as a kind of an extended personal letter. My thousands of subscribers I saw as friends, mostly unseen. I thought of them as Peter thought of Christ, "having not seen him, we love him." So, I was not simply an editor, as I saw it, but a personal correspondent. Many of my readers responded in kind, making correspondence a large part of my work. That also explains why through the years I did nearly all of the writing. My paper was an extension of myself.

This is why I viewed my mailing list as a personal thing, not unlike one's address book. I have therefore refrained from sharing it with others. It was never for sale, even though this is common practice in the publication world. Too, I am aware that when people subscribe to a journal it is hardly fair to them for their names and addresses to be sent to mailing rooms across the land. We all get more unsolicited mail than we want, "junk" being an appropriate adjective for much of it. So, it has been my policy all these years to safeguard my mailing list as a sacred trust, sharing it with none at all, however deserving the cause.

Now that *Restoration Review* will cease to be come December of 1992, I have decided to make one exception and share my mailing list with *Integrity*, with certain stipulations. It is to

be used but one time, no copies of the list will be made, and it will not be shared with others. This means that readers of *Restoration Review* will receive this sample copy of *Integrity* and that will be it. If you desire to continue receiving the paper, you will have to make the appropriate response, which I hope you will.

I make this gesture because of my high regard for *Integrity* and its dedicated staff. All these years it has hung in and stayed with its knitting, its purposes being similar to those of *Restoration Review*. It has been a catalyst for change without being confrontational. It has worked for the renewal of the church without being either shallow or vindictive. It has always had something to say and it has said it well. I hope that it, like Moses and *Restoration Review* and Alexander Campbell (who had 41!) will have its full 40 years in its habitual vision of excellence.

While this is not a hard and fast promise, it may be that I can visit now and again with my old readers by way of an occasional article in *Integrity*. In any event, I invite you on board, confident that the voyage will be worthwhile. A common response from *Restoration Review* readers was, "I do not always agree, but you make me think." *Integrity* will do as much. The lovers quarrel with the church must go on until she is all that God wants her to be.

Leroy Garrett

### Attention Restoration Review Subscribers

If you have received this issue for the first time because you are a *Restoration Review* subscriber, and you would like to receive *Integrity* on a regular basis, send your name and address to: *Integrity*, 4051 S. Lincoln Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858.

# The God in Chains

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

October-December, 1982 Reprint

How fortunate it is that we may know the true and living God and not be condemned to wander through the mental aisles of fable and fantasy. We serve One who, as the Eternal Word, actually spoke man into being from the dust of the ground, and who, when he saw man dwelling in a realm of darkness and despair, left the glory world to share his lot of suffering. He brought light, for it was said, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness is powerless to overcome it." He brought fire, for he said, "I have come to fling fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled."

I am concerned that he also is chained! But his links were not forged by a jealous God. Rather, he is chained by those to whom he has brought life, those who profess to be his friends. Not upon some lonely mountain height, but in the midst of the teeming world which he seeks to save, we have fettered him with chains of our own contriving, and he is inhibited and restrained because of our own tragic littleness, bigotry and intolerance.

## Traditions

We have chained him with our *traditions*. Confusing cultural contingencies with the divine will revealed through the holy apostles and prophets, we have sought to perpetuate the human judgment of our fathers, and to "attempt the Future's portals with the Past's bloodrusted key," to borrow a phrase from James Russell Lowell. We have measured God's will by the way we have done, rather than testing what we have done by way of God's will. It has not been so much a matter of what is the divine purpose, as what has been our prescribed policy.

It is true that while deploring a liturgical approach to God, we have developed a ritual and

any departure from it is regarded as a betrayal of the word of God. Our songs are often stereotyped, our prayers patterned and our praise programmed. If the Holy Spirit wanted to infiltrate our worship, and there is no clear sign that he does, he would have to apply for the privilege and might be assigned a five-minute spot right after the offering on the first Sunday of next month. We drive from us those who would pry open the windows looking in the direction of glory and let the fresh winds of heaven waft away the musty odor of our monastic staleness.

I trust it will not startle you to tell you that we have lost Jesus in the Bible and lost the Bible in the church. We must now rescue Jesus from the Bible or become like the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus said, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but their purpose is to testify of me. And you will not come unto me that you might have life."

Life does not come from searching the scriptures. The scriptures do not produce life eternal. The scriptures are a gift from God. We have confused the love letters with the Lover; the Captain of our salvation with his orders; the fodder with the Shepherd; and the prescription with the Physician. We have eclipsed the Son of God with the wisdom of the sons of men. And by worshiping the scriptures we often end up with a head full of quotations and a heart empty of Jesus. Of what use is a road map if we are not going home to him? The prodigal could have been preoccupied with a road map and remained in the pig pen!

We must recover the Bible from the church. The people of God have carried the word of God captive. Once more the book of God has been lost in the temple of God. It has been buried beneath a pile of partisan practices,

cultural customs, institutional inventions, doctrinal deductions and sectarian shame. Traditions are like parasite plants which grow up and entwine themselves around the trunk of truth, and appear, at first, to support it rather than the opposite. Left alone they sap the strength and multiply their foliage until life is stifled and the tree deadened by what once appeared to be innocent and harmless development.

## Prejudices

We have chained him with our *prejudices*. Prejudice is the progeny begotten by ignorance and conceived by pride. It confronted Jesus upon every turn. It motivated James and John to suggest calling down fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village in a holocaust of vengeance. It flung a cringing woman, whose immoral liaison was interrupted, down at his feet to see if he would sentence her to death beneath a barrage of stones. Its blinded frenzy drove nails into his hands and feet and a pang of passion into his pulsating heart.

Prejudice is the clabbering of the milk of human kindness. It is a cataract growth of slimy false pride over the eye of the inner man. It makes a caricature of the cross of Christ and converts the church from a company of the compassionate into a hold of hostility and even hatred. No one who walks in the steps of our Lord can do so while supported by a mental crutch of racial, sexual or social superiority, for "in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, but we are all one in Christ Jesus." And in the context of the agony of our own day we may add, "There is neither black nor white, neither red nor yellow." We are all one!

Jesus deliberately moved into a world filled with selfishness and seething with prejudice. And he moved through that world challenging its smugness and status symbols. His parables were like dynamite to entrenched greed, and like piercing darts driven into the fat underbelly of social tyranny and inequality. In view of this it is to our shame that those who lead in the fight for justice and equality before the law are frequently outside the pale of discipleship, driven by a sense of humanitarian concern rather than

reverence for his will "who made of one blood all nations of men." Our love should be as deep as the love of God, our mercy should be as wide as the mercy of God, our grace should be as broad as the grace of God.

## Sectarianism

We chain him with our *sectarianism*. We are the heirs of a noble ideal. The historical movement which gave us being, was born in the hearts of devout men, most of them within the Presbyterian background, who could no longer tolerate the toils of partisan bondage. They were, to quote the words of one of them, "aware from sad experience, of the heinous nature and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians; tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit." As a result of this feeling they inaugurated what another of them called "a project to unite the sects, or rather, the Christians in all of the sects."

The dream was magnificent. The vision was glorious. But Satan is always lurking in the purple shadows, ready to move in and divert any reform into another sect, and to betray its adherents into becoming more intolerant than those who they vainly sought to reform. That we are not altogether free from the nauseating taint of the party spirit, which is a world of the flesh, is evident "at sundry times and in divers manners."

I still go to meetings where men arise during open forums to ask, "How do you find the attitude of 'your brethren' as compared to that of 'our brethren?'" Regardless of the attitude of anyone else, the attitude of such a questioner is sectarian. Like Peter on the morning before the crucifixion, his speech betrays him. So long as we think in terms of "our brethren" and "your brethren" we are still infected with the virus of sectarianism. The family of God is not divided into ours and yours, but it is one, and it is his!

The Jews forgot that they belonged to God and concluded that God belonged to them. The result was a selfish spirit of superiority which severed them from the desperate agony of a world dying in need of their witness of God.

Instead of acting as leaven to the masses of mankind they spent precious time quarreling and bickering over political and theological points of view, until they were splintered and fragmented into all types of sects by the time "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men." It is significant that he allied himself with no Jewish party and wore no sectarian label.

We must never lose sight of the danger of hiding ourselves from the very world we are called upon to penetrate with our witness. If we build walls to shelter us from contact with those who are outside, it is those behind the walls and not those outside them who are the prisoners. One of the tragedies of our day is that we have allowed fear to drive us into seclusion where we have no contact with others who believe in the one Lord. Our buildings become monasteries and retreats, and we resign ourselves to holding the fort instead of storming it.

## The Body of Christ

It is time for us to rise above the provincial thinking which is evident in so many areas and to recapture the concept of the body of Christ. That body is greater than any party, sect or segment, and greater than all of them taken together. It is mightier than any movement within it, and that includes the restoration movement. Thomas Campbell did not restore the church. It had never ceased to exist. Just as there has never been a time since the original creation that the breath of life has not flowed in and out of the nostrils of man, so there has not been a time since the new creation when the body of Christ has not been pulsating with the life of the Spirit. A body cannot die as long as its head is alive! Jesus has never been a head without a member, a shepherd without a sheep, a king without a subject, or a teacher without a disciple.

Restoration movements come and go! They

rise and wane! They flourish and disappear! But the community of the redeemed ones goes on forever. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. If we allow this restoration movement to fail in uniting the Christians among the sects, if we fall out by the way and end up as quarrelsome sects, God can wipe us off the map and start another historical movement. He is not out of Presbyterians yet! If we decline our destiny and prostitute our purpose, we can be lost among the welter of multiplying sects, but God's purpose will still triumph. He will bring forth judgment unto victory! He will not fail, nor fail his will.

Jesus left the ecstasy of glory to share the agony of our suffering. He came into the stinking and wretched slave quarters where the lash of the taskmaster of sin lacerated our souls. He unlocked the clanking chains clamped on our hearts, and set us free. I plead with you now to liberate him from the fetters we may fasten upon him within our factional walls. Roll away the stone from the door of our parties which we have transformed into sepulchers, and let the living Lord come forth. Let the world hear again those reassuring words, "It is I! Be not afraid!"

And I plead with you to consecrate and dedicate your youthful vigor to the battle against tradition, prejudice, and the sectarian spirit until the sunset comes, and the Savior calls, and the glorious acclamation of triumph rings in your ears, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Glory awaits, and tomorrow will be brighter than today!

---

W. Carl Ketcherside fought "the sectarian spirit" until the Savior called him home May 24, 1989. A preacher and writer within the Stone-Campbell movement since boyhood, Carl eventually declared himself to be a "disciple at large." The above message is an extract from a speech he gave at the North American Christian Convention in Indianapolis in 1973, and still challenges us nearly 20 years later.

---

*He who walks in integrity walks securely. Prov. 10:9*

---

## What We Have to Offer

HOY LEDBETTER

July/August 1986 Reprint

During the past few years I have had numerous occasions to discuss Christian unity with ecumenical leaders of various kinds, including officials of the World Council of Churches. Again and again such discussions have reminded me of a document which, although it was first published in 1809, still seems as fresh as the latest unity meeting. I refer to Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, which has not only been a powerful force within our own communion, but anticipated to a great extent the modern ecumenical movement almost a century and a half later. If Campbell were living today, he would be thrilled to see his concerns so widely shared, and I have no doubt that he would be at the forefront of efforts to unite professing Christians. Which is exactly where his spiritual descendants *should* be.

Because I frequently see people either moving toward or having arrived at the ideas expressed in the *Declaration and Address*, and since that document remains a potent stimulus within my own communion, notwithstanding the fact that we sometimes seem to have forgotten it, I believe our people have more to contribute to contemporary discussion than we may realize.

This is particularly true now that serious attention is being given to the problem of resolving dogmatic differences between the churches, and there is widespread recognition that real progress is impossible without determining what can be done with honest but divisive disagreement on Bible requirements. Since this has always been a big issue with us, and we understand how vehemently people of strong convictions defend their doctrinal positions, we should be ready to share whatever wisdom we have in this matter with the rest of the religious world.

Another positive development for us is the growing conviction, at least among some leaders, that the autonomous churches (such as we are) need to be drawn into the ecumenical discussions. I believe this would be a constructive move, not only because of the statistical significance of the independent churches, but because they can bring with them no small amount of experience in dealing with problems of unity, especially on the local level.

I realized that citing the *Declaration and Address* hardly inspires some of our own folks to stand up and sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers"; they are too far removed from their roots. They could never take up Barton Stone's call, "Let Christian unity be our polar star"; it would stick in their throats. And their defense mechanisms engage at the very mention of the word "ecumenical." But they do not speak for all of us, or even most of us. Let them preach and practice exclusionism if they must, but let us get on with what the Lord ordered us to do and carry out a ministry of reconciliation.

## Only One Body

To begin at the beginning, the first of Thomas Campbell's propositions in the *Declaration and Address* asserts "that the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." This forceful statement means that unity is related to the fundamental nature of the body of Christ, being an indispensable aspect of what the church is. It means that the church is united by God's design and plan, and in no other way can it be what God intended for it to be. It means that unity is built into the basic structure of the church, as a vital ingredient in its make-up.

The fact that unity is not always a high-priority topic in congregational goal-setting is

all the more reason this characteristic of God's church needs to be constantly emphasized. It is an element of the gospel which we tend to forget in the defense and maintenance of our denominational turf, and our active devotion to it does not quite seem to fulfill the Biblical requirement of *diligence* in this matter. So this historic emphasis needs to be echoed among us today.

Campbell recognized, of course, that the one church "must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate from one another," but nevertheless "there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them." Can that noble, and often elusive, objective be attained?

## The Bible Can Unify

A practical as well as essential means of maintaining the Spirit's unity is to take the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. But it should be quickly said that this does not mean what it is sometimes assumed to mean, when it has become the boast of factions which base their rights to exist on biased, or at least questionable, interpretation of chosen passages. Rather it means that nothing should be made a condition of fellowship or a requirement of faith unless it is, as Campbell put it, "expressly taught and enjoined upon" Christians in the word of God. What is "expressly taught and enjoined" is, by definition of the terms, definitely and unmistakably stated and clearly and emphatically bound. Unless an article of faith can be so described, it must not be made a test of fellowship. This rule alone would eliminate the basic reasons many churches exist as separate entities.

It is almost always the case that beliefs which keep Christians apart from each other are not based upon the express teaching of the New Testament, but upon inferences and deductions. We all know how that within a given group inference may become *necessary* inference and therefore justify breach of fellowship over what another group may with equal conviction deem unnecessary. History is littered with sects who have defended their party characteristics in this way.

For a corrective to that inevitably divisive approach one need not look beyond Campbell's proposition "that although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God."

Unfortunately not all inferences are "fairly inferred." But when they are, they may be truly regarded as God's doctrine. However, that does not mean that they will be so recognized by everyone, and, even though true, they may exhibit to the minds of some honest seekers the wisdom of men rather than the truth of God. Christian communion cannot stand on such an unreliable basis. Therefore, even accurate inferences and deductions cannot be bound upon Christians "farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so." This approach accords perfectly with Paul's rule that "each one must arrive at his own firm conviction" (Rom. 14:5).

In developing the positive and negative items of it creed, in stating the terms of its faith and working out its defense against error, the church will develop arguments which are in a great measure the result of human reasoning and which essentially contain many inferential truths. While these are very valuable for their purpose, they must never become tests of fellowship. To make them conditions of mutual acceptance would be to say that "none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information," which is denied by the Biblical recognition that the church will always contain members who will vary considerably in spiritual maturity.

## To Be An Undivided Family

It has been our long-standing position that men and women are entitled to a place in the church without full knowledge of the truth, and that they should never "be required to make

a profession more extensive than their knowledge." Profession of their faith in Christ and obedience which issues from a realization that they are lost and that he is the only way of salvation is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his church.

All those who make that profession and put it into practice should consider each other as the precious saints of God and should love each other as brethren, as children of the same family and Father. And none among them should ever dare to put asunder those whom God has joined together.

It was Thomas Campbell's position "that division among Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils." He declared it to be antichristian, antiscritptural, and antinatural. It destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; it is a direct violation of his express command; and it stirs up Christians to despise, hate, and oppose one another, when they are bound by the gospel to love each other as brethren, even as Christ loved them.

Finally, Campbell contended that whenever it is absolutely necessary for the church, in order to fulfill its mission, to adopt expedients for which there is no express scriptural statement, these must be clearly marked as human expedients, without any pretense to a more sacred origin, so that any differences regarding them arising later on may produce neither contention nor division within the church. This rule provides an important safeguard against the perpetual tendency to regard long-standing incidental practices as fundamentals of the faith.

While Campbell's propositions are, in a way, an embarrassment to me, because they

demonstrate that we should have known better than to practice division and multiply sects among ourselves, I am nevertheless pleased to be able to set them forth against sectarianism today, outside our fellowship as well as within. In reviewing them, I am also grateful to recall that they have never been entirely lost sight of within our movement, for there has always been a remnant of nonsectarian folks, faithful to their heritage, who have kept restating them.

The propositions, while very comprehensive, may not cover every difficult obstacle to unity which we may face, nor are they intended to be the last word on solving the problems of fellowship. They should be supplemented with the lessons we have learned through generations of study and experience since they were first given to us, and subjected to reexamination among those who are disposed to grow in the truth. But that they will get high marks when tested by either Biblical exegesis or practical experience I firmly believe. Consequently, we may bring them to bear upon ecumenical discussions today with the expectation that they will be welcomed by reasonable people and contribute to the unity of the Spirit in our time. Given their potential for doing good in a world weary of division, they are indeed a gospel which we should not be ashamed to preach.

---

Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrity* for 15 years, has served as minister to several a cappella Churches of Christ during his years of ministry. He presently ministers to First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Albany, Georgia with his wife Jary.

INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

# Dry Bread and Cold Potatoes?

LAQUITA M. HIGGS

May/June 1987 Reprint

Most of the people walked confidently into the dining hall, but once they got inside, they were hesitant, for on the serving table were all sorts of exotic and unknown foods. "I like my meat and potatoes," huffed one, and he refused to consider the mangoes and lychees. "I've never eaten any of this, and I'm not about to start now," declared another. "I'm sure I wouldn't like it anyway," and she passed by the crisp pompadums. "I'm afraid to try that," commented another, as she eyed the luscious raspberry mousse gateau, "The raspberries are probably irradiated." Another's reaction was puzzling as he looked at the lentil casserole, "Yuk! Only low class people would eat that." And he missed the nutritious casserole as well as the tasty tabouleh salad. Over at the artichoke plate, one was heard to exclaim, "I'm not about to eat that; I don't even know how. It would make me look stupid!"

One by one they passed by the main serving table to go to a small one over in a dark corner. It didn't have much on it, but it was familiar food and would at least sustain them for awhile. They hurriedly ate their dry bread and cold potatoes and drank their water so that they could get out as quickly as possible. They never knew what they had missed.

Some churches are like that. They hurriedly get through the worship, and they are content. They have done their duty, and they have just enough to sustain them. Or have they? If only those churches knew the delights of a deeper and more meaningful worship, they would not be content with dry bread and cold potatoes. How sad for a church to be in the rut of complacent and dull worship. God probably gets pretty tired of it, too. In fact, it may not be true worship at all if it is complacent and dull, for genuine and intense worship is not going to be dry or cold. What a joy to be among people who

are tasting of the Lord's delights, experiencing the awe of his presence, and singing to the Lord "with all their hearts" — as Paul in Ephesians 5 tells us to do. No dry bread and cold potatoes here.

How can we break out of that rut of dry-bread-and-cold-potato worship? Three steps may help. First, we have to *want* to break out of the rut, and this may be the biggest sticking point for some churches. Along with that must be a *willingness* to accept the awkwardness or discomfort that goes with making ourselves open to new experiences which can bring growth. Underlying both the desire and the willingness must be a *trust* that God wants and honors our sincere attempts to worship him and that he will bring good results.

## Wanting More of God

To truly know God is to desire him, and the more we know him and focus on him, the stronger will be our desire to worship him meaningfully. Dry bread and cold potatoes just aren't enough anymore. Praise and thanksgiving well up within us, truly drawing us closer to him—and to the heart of real worship.

The leaders of a church are crucial in fostering the hunger to come closer to God in worship. If they are sensitive, they will usually be ahead of the congregation in encouraging worship experiences which are spiced with a sense of the eternal newness of knowing God. If they are adamantly opposed to any attempt to go beyond certain comfortable habits in the forms of worship, it may seem that a church is hopelessly blocked from exploring more meaningful worship experiences. In these hard cases, try prayer. Don't just pray at a distance that the leaders will allow some changes; seek respectfully and lovingly to pray with them. Pray that a desire to know God and be in his presence

will spring up in hearts throughout the congregation. Pray that the Lord will provide opportunities for all the congregation to taste and know deeper worship experiences, but remember that you, too, must be open to God's challenges and instruction, just as you are wanting others to be.

## Willingness to Accept Growth

Even when people know about the positive effects of praise-worship, they may still have certain fears which are a barrier. Some may be in the rut of concentrating on correct form and pattern in worship and assume that there is only one way (the old way) of doing things. Some may be afraid of the exuberance in more intense worship, and such people should be brought along gently and lovingly. Some of us grew up with the idea that emotion in worship was wrong and even dangerous. Yes, emotion can get out of hand, and as a church we are to discipline ourselves so that worship is orderly and meets with the truths of God's word. On the other hand, we must not be afraid of showing genuine emotion in our worship if it is expressing genuine feelings toward God. We love God with our head and our will, but we also love him with our heart. The deepest worship is going to involve our emotions, praise as well as tears.

Music has a special role in worship, so don't be afraid to learn new songs. When the Spirit is working among a people, new songs will emerge and old ones will come alive. Certain songs may become particularly meaningful to the congregation for a time, as they seem to express just what the congregation is feeling in its worship. Music, which is closely linked with the Spirit's working in a congregation in worship (Eph. 5:19), is a good barometer of a church's spirituality; a church that is alive and well in the Lord will have lively singing.

We cannot, of course, gauge our worship solely by how it makes us feel, by whether the singing moved us or whether exciting things happened. Our worship experiences must be checked with the truth of God. But truth is not sterile or lifeless. Jesus taught that truth sets us free, and he added that if "the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free" (John 8:32, 36). Truth

is not restrictive; it is liberating.

Freedom, however, is frightening to some; leaders sometimes worry that a freer worship will be too unstructured and disorderly, or that harmful elements will creep in. Freedom in worship does not preclude the planning of worship. Leaders should carefully, prayerfully, and creatively plan worship services, for we must give our best to the Lord; but worship leaders should also be willing to abandon those plans if the Lord intervenes with a better idea. Sometimes our ideas of decorum may need to be modified. David's wife, Michal, was most unhappy when David brought the Ark of the Lord back to Jerusalem. David "danced without restraint before the Lord. . . Michal looked down through a window and saw King David leaping and capering before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart." David defended his behavior to Michal, "Before the Lord I will dance for joy, yes, and I will earn yet more disgrace and lower myself still more in your eyes." The writer then comments, "Michal . . . had no child to her dying day" (II Sam. 6:14, 16, 22-3). We must be careful not to look down our noses at those who are freer and less inhibited before the Lord than we are, or we may end up being spiritually barren, just as Michal was physically barren. Sometimes the less inhibited may want to use their body to express their praise, such as in clapping, raising of hands, or kneeling. We should not "despise" them, but realize that God may be wanting to use them to lead us all to a freer worship before God, using our body as well as our mind, will, and heart.

## Trusting God for Good Results

If we are to step beyond our fears, we must trust that if we are truly humbling ourselves before God in adoration and praise, the effects are going to be his glory. God delights in our worship, and in turn our praise quickens our desire for God. As praise brings us into contact with truth—for God is Truth—we become more conscious of the need for truth in our own lives. True worship does not always make us feel good, but if we acknowledge our poverty before him and approach him in the truth of our

nothingness, he will bring us even closer to himself. David wrote, "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth" (Ps. 145:18).

One critic of a church with vigorous and joyful services was heard to say that it is not good to come out of worship "on such a high because you'll always hit such a low afterwards." If it is merely a search for a "high" experience, then it is not true worship and there will only be a let-down afterwards, sometimes even a crash. But if it is true worship, centered upon God, it will be a stabilizing influence in our lives, producing the fruits of faith and loyalty to our Lord. Worship which has carried us into the presence of the Lord's glory will edify and strengthen; it will send us back into the world with a renewed sense of mission and eagerness to serve him.

Worship is not always the lyrical song of joy, of course. Sometimes it is silence and deep awe in his presence. Recently at the end of one of our worship services, the congregation continued sitting at the end; no one moved for several minutes. We all knew we had been in the presence of the Lord in a special way, and it was truly awesome.

We cannot manufacture moments of awe; they come only from the Lord. No matter how hard we try, our worship services are going to be barren without the Spirit of God to help us worship. You might think that we could at least worship him in our own power, but we can-

not. As Paul writes, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord!' except under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). It is the Spirit who explores "even the depths of God's own nature" (1 Cor. 2:10). It is the Spirit who guides us into all truth (John 16:13), not just the truth of doctrine, but the truth of a relationship with God. Even in giving God our love and our worship, we must have the help of his Spirit.

If your congregation is feeding only upon dry bread and cold potatoes, call upon the Lord to plant in your congregation a new desire for him, a willingness to grow, and a deep trust that, if he is in charge, all will be well. If possible, pray with others for each of your worship services. It is good to have a regular time of prayer before each service, attended by the leaders of that service and any others who want to come. When the prayer-room is full of people earnestly praying, the subsequent worship service will be full of the presence of God. May your congregation come to his feast and be willing to taste adventurously of his delights. As David wrote, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (Ps. 34:3).

---

Laquita M. Higgs, a graduate of Abilene Christian University, has a doctorate in Medieval European history and teaches at the University of Michigan (Dearborn). She has worked and written for *Integrity* magazine for nearly 15 years.

*Integrity* offers bound volumes of series of issues that focus on one theme. These volumes are \$2.00 each, or \$1.50 each in lots of ten or more.

"Unity and Christian Fellowship" (2 issue volume)

"Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage" (3 issue volume)

"Holy Spirit" (5 issue volume)

Also available:

"Woman's Place in Church Activity" by Norman L. Parks, \$2.00 each, \$1.50 each in lots of ten or more.

Send your order and money to Amos Ponder, 1269 Pickwick Place, Flint, MI 48507 and make your check payable to *Integrity*.

## Freedom for Men and Women

J. BRUCE KILMER

*January/February 1987 Reprint*

"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."

I Tim. 5:23

"For, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Rom. 10:13

"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss."

I Thess. 5:26

"Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?"

I Cor. 15:29

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined. . ."

Rom. 8:29

". . .you also ought to wash one another's feet."

John 13:14

### Biblical Interpretation

How many of the above passages have been literally applied in churches which are heirs to the Restoration Movement?

From the beginning of the Restoration Movement, principles of interpretation of the Scripture have played an important role in defining the movement. Historical circumstances, author, purpose, date, and figurative language were all emphasized by Alexander Campbell as necessary considerations for proper interpretation of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as Leroy Garrett has pointed out, once these principles have been applied to a particular passage, we must still let Scripture as a whole and the life and Spirit of Christ guide our interpretation and application of the passage.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout our history, there has been an emphasis on searching the Scriptures for the answers to life's questions. One of the paramount questions facing the church today is the role of women in the church. Unfortunately, we have let tradition dictate much of what we practice in the church today regarding this question. Since the "Women's Movement" of the 1960's, our society has recognized many of the errors of our past treatment of women, just as in the 1800's we finally recognized that our treatment of blacks was wrong.

Today, we in the church can recognize our sins toward women without accepting all of society's solutions. We can recognize that equality of the sexes does not mean that there are not differences between males and females. But in this recognition of differences, we need to be careful not to accept the stereotyped traditions of what those differences are. Traditionally the church has said the differences involve roles in the church. Men's roles have included elder, deacon, minister, teacher, prayer leader, song leader, Scripture reader, communion server, etc. Women's roles have included almost anything that does not involve public speaking. This view is not only inconsistent with Scripture, it is inherently inconsistent.

Most of us would agree that those passages of Scripture printed at the beginning of this article must be interpreted for today, in light of their context, and in relation to the rest of Scripture. However, when it comes to passages referring to the role of women in the church, we have applied these principles of interpretation inconsistently. Furthermore, we have emphasized I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 at the expense of other passages which by their context have more universal application.

We have recognized that I Corinthians 14:34: "women should remain silent in the churches,"

should not be taken literally. Women sing in the churches and even speak and read Scripture during the Sunday School hour. We do not require women to wear veils as I Corinthians 11:3-16 seems to direct. We have allowed context and culture to influence our interpretation of these passages. This is not necessarily bad. We do the same thing when we interpret other passages involving such things as foot washing, fasting, the holy kiss, orders of widows, and one cup for communion. Why then have we stopped short in our application of these interpretive principles to I Corinthians 14? To properly understand not only the problems facing the early church, but the problems still facing the church today regarding the treatment of women, we need to start at the beginning, where the problems began.

## Man and Woman in the Beginning

Genesis 1-3 provides us with a framework for understanding the man/woman relationship as created by God and as altered by sin. Genesis 1:27 states that God created human beings in his image and as male and female. The image of God can be seen in the maleness and femaleness of his creation. God is in relationship in the Trinity, and that relationship is reflected in the relationship of males and females. In Genesis 1:28-30 we learn that together men and women are to have dominion over the rest of creation.

In Genesis 2 woman is described as a helpmate (2:18). The two Hebrew words "neged" and "ezer" translated "helper suitable" (NIV) or "helper as a partner" (NRSV) are not words of subordination. "Ezer" is used in other places in the Old Testament to refer to God and his relationship to humanity. (See Psalm 46:11; 146:3,5; 121:1-2.) "Ezer" is found in the Old Testament 21 times, and in 16 places it refers to a "super"ordinate helper and never to a subordinate helper.<sup>3</sup> The New American Standard Version footnote to "helper suitable" in Genesis 2:20 is "Lit., corresponding to." The connotation is a person adequate to meet all of man's needs for physical, intellectual, and social

communion. Adam recognized the equality of woman when he stated:

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken" (Genesis 2:23).

This account in Genesis reveals that man and woman were created equal, with equal authority over creation and with a relationship that reflected God's image. It is only *after* sin entered the creation that we see inequality. In addition to the "enmity" (Genesis 3:15) that was to come between man and woman, God told the woman:

"I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

This inequality was the result of sin. Because of sin, *not* because of anything inherent in the creation of man and woman, God told the woman that her husband would rule over her.

There were several other unnatural results of sin: the man and woman were sent from the garden and separated from God, the ground was cursed so that man would have to toil in order to eat, and death became the end for man and woman. (See Genesis 3:17-19).

These unnatural results from sin are manifested throughout the rest of the Bible and are still with us today. Just as Cain killed his brother, brothers and sisters kill one another today. Just as Adam found the ground cursed, we find a hole in our ozone. But just as we are not content with pain in childbirth (we do all we can to lessen it), and just as we are not content with thorns and thistles in farmland (we do all we can with fertilizers and weed-killers), we should not be content with hate and inequality between the sexes.

Throughout the Bible, we can see that God allowed his people to choose and exercise freedom within a sinful world. The wars, polygamy, monarchy, and patriarchy recorded

in the Old Testament are not God ordained.<sup>4</sup> These are not inherent in the creation revealed in Genesis 1 and 2, but are the results of the sin reported in Genesis 3.

The divisions brought about by the "first Adam," such as the divisions between male and female, Jew and Greek, and slave and free, are not natural. We should not accept them as natural. We should not be content to accept and even perpetuate these divisions. Jesus Christ, the "second Adam" came to declare these divisions unnatural and to heal them. (See Galatians 3:28; Romans 5:12-19; and I Corinthians 15:21-22.)

## The New Age

Jesus ushered in a new age. He spoke to women as equals with men (see John 4:27). He had women followers, some of whom financially supported him (Luke 8:3). He did not push for an "Equal Rights Amendment," but he did not try to make Rome issue an "Emancipation Proclamation" for slaves either. He may not have chosen a woman apostle, but he did not choose a Greek apostle either.

In this new age, the norm is seen at Pentecost; it had been prophesied centuries before:

"...Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . Even on my servants both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. . ." (Acts 2:17, 18).

The early church picked up on Jesus' lead in the equal treatment of women and, in the New Testament church, women prayed and prophesied in public (I Corinthians 11:5); had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9); worked side-by-side with Paul; (Ephesians 4:3; Romans 16); taught men (Acts 18:24-26); held house-churches in their homes (Colossians 4:15; Acts 16:40); held the office of deacon (Romans 16:1); were referred to as apostles<sup>5</sup> (Romans 16:7); and need not marry to find their head of authority or their identity (I Corinthians 7). The New Testament does not indicate that the Holy Spirit distributed gifts by gender.

In the Churches of Christ today, I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 are emphasized complete-

ly out of proportion to other passages of Scripture which describe or address the issue of women's role in the church. We have taken two passages which are addressed to specific problems in specific churches and centered our doctrine of the role of women around them. When compared to the principles of equality which Paul articulated in Galatians 3:28 and in other passages, when compared to the way Jesus treated women, and when compared to the descriptions of women workers and leaders in the early church, I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 must be taken for what they are: passages addressing aberrations in a young church which had just freed women in Christ in a culture which had treated them as property. Therefore, instead of placing limitations on women today, these two passages actually prove how radical were the results of the acceptance of the gospel.

Just as Paul's statement about baptism for the dead in I Corinthians 15:29 does not provide the basis for our doctrine on baptism, the problems addressed in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 should not provide the framework for our beliefs on the role of women in the church. A better basis for a biblical doctrine of the role of women can be found by looking at the treatment and role of women throughout the Bible, by understanding the original design of creation revealed in Genesis 1-3, and by forming our conclusions in light of the life and work of Christ.

## Normative Passages

Galatians 3:28, not I Corinthians 14 or I Timothy 2, is the norm for relationships in Christ. In Christ the broken racial, social, and sexual relationships are healed. In Galatians 3:28 Paul was not just telling the Galatians that Greeks, slaves, and women could be saved. They knew that Greeks, slaves, and women had been part of the Jewish temple and synagogue, and they were members of the church in Galatia. Paul was saying that the unequal distinctions, the prejudicial treatment, the special requirements were wrong. In Galatians 2, he had explained that accepting Greeks in the church was not enough. They must be



treated equally. Jews and Greeks must eat together.

Our response to the gospel is not just something that happens in our head. It has historical consequences. The walls and barriers have come down. (See Ephesians 2:11-22.) Paul had to oppose Peter to his face when he refused to eat with the Gentiles. It was not just a matter of not eating meat so that someone would not be offended. Peter was denying a result of the gospel: the dividing wall had come down. Paul could have said: "That's okay Peter, we don't want to offend the Jews. We know the Gentiles are equal, but they have a different role, and even if we *should* let them be equal, we can't at this time, because we don't want to ruffle any feathers in the church." But Paul did *not* make these excuses and rationalizations. More than half the members of the church were at stake. The integrity of the gospel and the church were at stake. So this is what Paul did:

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong" (Galatians 2:11).

And this is what Paul said:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

## How Will We Respond?

Today, the role of women in the Church of Christ, and in much of the church for that matter, has been determined by inconsistent biblical interpretation, undue emphasis on certain passages, and by virtually ignoring many normative passages of the Bible. Furthermore, our actions in the work place and in our daily lives have been inconsistent with the limited role we allow women in the church.

It's time we recognized that our doctrine of the role of women in the church and our behavior toward women in the church has often been irrational, inconsistent, and prejudicial. Repentance is needed so that we can cease quenching many of the spiritual gifts of our women (who make up more than half of our members) and cease forcing roles on some of our male members in which they are not gifted to serve. Then the church will have the hope of being what God intended: a barrier-free community where each individual is free to use his or her spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of the church.

"...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

### Endnotes

1. Girdwood, Robert L., "Hermeneutics and Unity," *Integrity*, Vol., 22, No. 4, p. 16 (January/February 1987).
2. *id.*
3. Scanzoni, Letha and Hardesty, Mary, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, Texas, Word Books, 1974), p. 26.
4. See Kilmer, J. Bruce, "Women in God's Plan," *Integrity*, Vol. 22, No. 4 p. 59 (July/August 1991).
5. See Ledbetter, Hoy, "Chips on a Stream," *Integrity*, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 67 (July/August 1991).

---

Bruce Kilmer grew up in the Churches of Christ (a capella), graduated from Abilene Christian University, and has served as an elder in the Church of Christ/Christian Church (instrumental). Currently, Bruce resides in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, where he works for the Michigan Supreme Court as a Regional State Court Administrator.

# Never Go To Bed Angry

JOSEPH F. JONES

January/February 1989 Reprint

"If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry — don't give the devil that sort of foothold" (Eph. 4:26, 27 Phillips). Though not really translating, Phillips does get to the essence of the apostolic exhortation about certain emotions and the new life in Christ. Recently, I asked a Sunday School class on the general theme of "The Christian and His Emotions" how many present had been angry that week, and without hesitation all twenty-two members of the class quickly raised their hands. Most Christians struggle with anger turned to sin, not understanding the nature or dynamics of anger, and certainly not always able to discern whether our anger is being dealt with constructively as in the life of our Lord, or destructively to the hurt of ourselves and others.

The words of the text, "Be angry but do not sin," are quoted by the apostle from Psalm 4:4 and applied to his own purpose as he encourages the new believers in Christ to put off their old ways of thinking and behaving, and to put on the new lifestyle in Christ. The heathen world of Paul's day had little enlightenment on how to handle the emotion of anger. We see anger and bitterness as it develops into hostility and resentment, and finally erupts into various forms of violence. Then again, we see Christians who lump all anger into the category of sin, unable to exercise the moral and spiritual distinction between authentic righteous anger and sinful anger, understandably condemned in the Scriptures. Consequently, many believers suffer with haunting guilt from the awareness of anger in their lives because of the indiscriminate preaching and teaching about this emotion, namely, that it is sinful for Christians to get angry.

As an emotional state, anger may be experienced with varying degrees of intensity,

from mild annoyance to violent rage. It is possible to employ the term anger as a "catch-all" phrase to include many human feelings which actually are not technically anger, although such feelings may, under given circumstances, turn into anger and occasion angry outbursts. The physically fatigued parent may out of exhaustion from the day's activities become very "angry" with the small child whose lack of coordination causes him to spill his milk, drop a dish of food, or, even more annoying, break one of mother's coveted plates. Extreme frustration can give rise to a reaction which is categorized as anger: the star basketball player who is having an "off night" and nothing he does goes right, thus producing an intolerable frustration; the golfer who misses short putts and loses a vital match, beating her club into the ground. But frustration as such is not necessarily anger.

Various occasions of embarrassment may produce reactions which look similar to anger but are not actually anger which the Bible warns against. A married couple may be very upset with one another, elevate their voices in discussing an issue, yet not be angry in the sense which the Bible forbids. We need clarification to help Christians distinguish between certain feelings being experienced and the presence of anger. Likewise, we need discernment between what is carnal anger leading to further sin and the righteous indignation which Jesus displayed and which his followers at times need to experience and express.

## Sinful Anger

While no definitive response can be attempted at this juncture about sinful anger, certain aspects of this sinful emotion can be singled out for clarification and instruction. Hendriksen

suggests that Eph. 4:26 be rendered simply, "Let not your rage be mixed with sin." The writer James exhorts us to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:19, 20). Sinful anger might be defined as that emotional state which motivates us to lash out at others, to hurt another verbally or physically, to become aggressive and vicious in our attitudes and actions, to want to slash and cut and inflict pain on another person. Carnal or sinful anger is an attitude of hatred, a deep desire to hurt and kill and destroy, and multiple are the ways in which this desire to hurt can be expressed without ever laying a hand on another physically.

The Christian needs to develop an awareness of the numerous stimuli which stir him or her to action, factors which may be primarily external and beyond that person's physical self, or factors within which respond to certain external experiences and stir anger and resentment.

(1) In our key verse for this study, Eph. 4:26, Phillips renders it, "If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper." When the self has not really died, has not been "crucified with Christ," to employ Paul's terminology, then the human ego can easily be bruised and wounded pride desires to lash back, even to hurt and make the offender pay. Be sure that your anger is not out of wounded pride.

(2) Distorted perceptions of reality can often lead to carnal or sinful anger. This is one of the major differences between the perfect anger of God and the imperfect anger of man, for God's anger is always a perfect reaction of righteous indignation at some form of unrighteousness; but man's angry reactions to life, though considered to be "righteous indignation," may well be a thoroughly distorted perception of reality. Dr. Gary Collins well concludes that "because we feel vulnerable, threatened or inclined to be critical, we misperceive the actions of others and jump to angry, perhaps often unjustified conclusions" (*Christian Counseling*, p. 102).

(3) Sinful anger may also be experienced when we realize guilt for our own behavior. Guilt, when healthily experienced, is designed of God to bring us to repentance for our failures to do his will; but guilt does not always have such a constructive and spiritual result. Guilt may stimulate intense anger at the one who has produced it. Israel's prophets are classic examples of those who stirred a nation's negative and impenitent anger when confronted with the Word of the Lord! Anger, not repentance, may well result from such guilt. The Word of God read with great meaning in worship may convict and either anger us or turn us toward repentance. We may frequently turn on friends, fellow believers, or family when faced with our behavior, and carnal anger is the result of such confrontations with the Word. Wounded pride, distorted perceptions, misdirected guilt can all result in sinful anger.

### Jesus and Constructive Coping

Most of us know too well that we must not let our anger (rage) be mixed with sin. But how can we avoid sinful reactions when wounded, when our perceptions are distorted, when guilt leaves us hurting, lashing back rather than repenting? Is there any personal example we can follow, or source of strength beyond ourselves upon which we can draw? We realize well that the apostle has warned, "Don't give the devil that sort of foothold" (literally, "And do not give a place to the devil"). For the devil will seize the opportunity of changing our indignation, whether righteous or unrighteous, into a grievance or grudge, a nursing of carnal wrath, and most regrettably, an unwillingness to forgive. How then can we heed that injunction, "Never go to bed angry?" We turn to our Lord's own life and example as he dealt with every possible kind of injury and insult.

(1) No matter what the nature of the situation facing him, Jesus never lost control, never exploded in physical or emotional violence. The two incidents most frequently cited when reference is made to Jesus' anger are the Temple cleansings. Seeing the shame and hypocrisy veiled under a cloak of brotherly service for their fellow Jews who had come to worship,

Jesus became livid with righteous anger; and making a "whip of cords" ("a lash of twisted rushes," as Schonfield renders it), he drove men and animals from the holy precincts (John 2:15). There is no evidence that Jesus struck either man or beast with this device. Commenting on this very point, Leon Morris makes this incisive observation: "It is clear that it was not so much the physical force as the moral power he employed that emptied the courts" (*New International Commentary on the New Testament - John*, p. 194.)

(2) Jesus had no problem resorting to healthy, direct confrontation with those who were the source of hurt and anger. It is important to both the offended and the offender that there be healthy verbal confrontation where possible. In cleansing the Temple areas, it is clear that his confrontation assumed some physical aspects in that he overturned the money-changers' tables and released the caged pigeons. But then followed the verbal confrontation recorded in the Gospel accounts. On another occasion Jesus became indignant (*aganakteo*, a powerfully strong word) when his disciples interfered with his blessing the children, and rebuked them with pointed language. I like my own free paraphrasing of this incident: "Let these children be brought to me by their mothers, and don't you dare try to stop them; for it is people with attitudes like these little children who will get into the kingdom; and if your attitudes don't change, you won't see the kingdom, much less enter it" (See Mark 10:13-16 for the actual account). Then came a physical display of Jesus' warmth and emotion of caring, as he "took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them."

(3) A third dimension of Jesus' healthy handling of anger's energy is seen in his efforts to clarify and correct even while rebuking those whose beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles were the sources of hurt, pain, and subsequent anger. For instance, Jesus' irritation and anger could be roused by others' impure motives, or efforts to entrap him with subtle questions and dilemmas. The Sadducees' efforts to catch him with a veiled theological inquiry about the resurrection when questioning him about marriage is

a case in point. But note Jesus' way of turning their intent and his consequent anger into clarification and correction. "Is this not why you are wrong, that you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven" (See Mark 12:18-27). How incisive the Lord could be in turning very anger-producing situations into clarification and teaching occasions. Christians must likewise make every effort to handle their own anger and relationships involving anger, to clarify all the variables in an anger situation, and to correct behavior on the part of others which appears to be unchristian. (4) One further aspect of Jesus' coping with the anger associated with his own hurt or the hurt which he observed inflicted on others, was his evident readiness and willingness to extend forgiveness where there was repentance. The Jesus who could speak of the millstone and the Gehenna of fire could also assure guilty yet penitent sinners of divine grace and forgiveness. Love that can be hurt so deeply and become so angered as in the Person of Jesus, can also manifest a caring that leads to the cross. There is a remarkably disarming dynamic with the individual who, though hurt deeply and angered bitterly, can also extend forgiveness to the very one who has hurt. Here then is Jesus' example of constructive handling of his own hurt and anger that becomes our ultimate model.

"Never go to bed angry," urged the apostle Paul. Certainly we can believe, having looked at our Lord's personal, powerful and constructive handling of anger, that he never laid down in peaceful rest with a heart filled with anger and bitterness. At the close of the day and the coming of sunset, which to the Jew was the beginning of a new day, the Lord Jesus could peacefully rest both body and mind, free of anger and all other stresses of Life's mission, and so can we.

---

Joseph F. Jones has ministered to the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan, for 26 years. He holds doctorates in higher education and in pastoral counseling. Joseph has served as writer and board member for *Integrity* since its earliest years, and has provided leadership as president of the board for the last 12 years.