







## Glorifying God with one voice: the unity of the assembly

**S**trong. Weak. Two words that polarize. Two words that are painful. Two words that are all too real. As you take up this new issue of *Integrity*, it is my prayer that God will use it to help us grow in our understanding of and treatment of others whose faith and practice is different from our own.

Strong. Weak. Which one am I? Does it matter? How does God view these two categories? And are these stereotypes that really are not helpful in church life?

For twenty-five years in full time ministry I have observed numerous occasions in church life where issues of strong and weak have contributed to a lack of congregational unity. I am intrigued and somewhat amused at the energy some of us expend in trying to promote unity across denominational lines when we do not even experience it in our own home congregations! How can we have any kind of unity with others when we haven't even tasted it for ourselves?

It is unfortunate that the public assembly on Sunday morning becomes the proverbial lightning rod where strong and weak choose to do battle. Allow me to give you an illustration.

A few years ago one of my dear, good brothers called me and wanted

to have lunch. He was disturbed that clapping was going on during the Sunday morning worship time. During lunch I sat and listened attentively trying to understand his point of view. Larry (not his real name) honestly had concerns that were troubling him. When he finished it was obvious to me that this was not just a picky issue, it was indeed a central practice of his faith on Sunday morning that he honestly felt was being violated.

I promised Larry that the next time there was a baptism or some other occasion for celebration I would not be the one to initiate the clapping. I wanted him to know how much our relationship in Jesus meant. After all, we were golfing buddies, and everyone knows how sacred that relationship is!

Wonder of all wonders. The next Sunday morning the Lord led someone to the baptismal font and the congregation broke out in spontaneous applause. Immediately following the services Larry approached me in anger accusing me of instigating the entire affair! He left and never came back. I felt hurt, hopeless and helpless.

On another occasion I took on the pioneering role of trying to change some people's thinking on how we

needed to move forward to really make a difference in our community. A small group of frightened, fearful brothers and sisters demanded my resignation. In the overcrowded, overheated little room that night approximately 35 people were in attendance, some calling for my immediate resignation.

It is amazing how God works. A wise and dear Christian brother that week sent me a message on e-mail and suggested that I look at Romans 14. I left that week to attend a seminar in Texas. On the way, I stopped to worship at a congregation where the Sunday morning class teacher had a very penetrating lesson on Romans 14. When I arrived in Austin, Texas, I heard the first presentation by Dr. James Thompson on Romans 14! God had to knock me over the head three times before he had my attention.

That week I prayed, meditated, and listened for God and what he wanted me to know from this portion of Paul's letter. The next Sunday, with a broken and contrite heart, I apologized before the congregation because I had been operating from a selfish agenda, trying to change people into a group I wanted. I asked for their forgiveness. The hugs and tears afterwards were the most bonding and healing I had ever experienced after a Sunday morning service.

Strong. Weak. Paul has strong admonitions for both. But the ultimate goal in their relationship together is found in Romans 15:5,6:

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with

one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Too often we approach the public assembly worship time as we do the supermarket. We come looking for what suits our taste. If we are disappointed, we conclude the whole experience was a waste of time and either go somewhere else, resign ourselves to apathy, or try to force others to change. There is another option.

The entire context of Romans 14:1-15:6 has to do with the relationship between the strong and the weak. And even though the major differences that Paul was dealing with had to do with ethnic background, we all bring a solidified world view and background to our worship experience. How do we get beyond our different backgrounds to the point where we can jointly worship and glorify God?

### Who's strong; who's weak?

I remember the very week when I experienced a reversal of my understanding about who is strong and who is weak. After preparing a lesson for Sunday School on Romans 14, it dawned upon me that what I had been taught growing up was exactly the opposite of Paul's treatment of the subject. I grew up with the notion that the strong were those who had a whole list of things they did not do. The weak were those who had not been Christians long and did not know much about that long list, which was supposed to keep you faithful to God.

But in reality, the strong are those whose relationship with God is not based on rules and regulations. The weak are those who try to bind their own rules and regulations on others. Paul points out that the strong are not to despise the weak, and the weak are not to pass judgment on the strong. I have been on both sides of the fence. I know what it is like to pass judgment on others and I know, unfortunately, what is like to despise others.

The key is walking in love so we can glorify God with one voice.

I believe that God intends that the worship assembly be a practical application of our love for one another. It is where we defer to the consciences of those we love. It is the place where we take the focus off of ourselves and what we want and seek to please, honor and glorify God. This attitude of mutual deference is rarely practiced. We do not know how to care for each other's hearts and souls because we have not been down on our knees for each other.

This purpose and practice of the worship assembly transcends issues of comfort, tradition, and change. I have had to learn that what really ministers to my soul in worship in

most cases would be thought of as bizarre or strange. My personal preferences now recede into the background. My number one concern is for my God and my brothers and sisters in Christ.

The worship activities in the assembly force us to be united. The theological ramifications of unity are actually put into practice whether we like it or not. God has designed the assembly to force us to unite. Otherwise, I know for a fact, many of us would never speak to one another or even associate with one another. But God has another purpose in mind. As we glorify Him together we are transformed together. In a mystical and powerful way united voices can blend hearts.

Unity is sacred. Jesus prayed for it. God desires it. Satan detests it. We are unsure about it. But we pursue it. Unity in the body is a gift of the Holy Spirit. May we with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

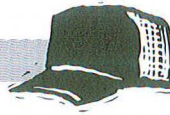


Curtis McClane  
Editor-in-Chief

**“Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with.**

**Treat them gently.**

—Beginning of Romans 14, *The Message*, Eugene Peterson



## Dilemma on the diamond (an allegory)

Elton Higgs

Coach Bart Matthews strode down the hall with perplexity imprinted on his face. He had just witnessed a strange scene out on the community baseball practice field, an argument between Alex Proskopton and Fred Dunatos. Alex was the sort of player that always gives a coach fits: he couldn't field an easy ground ball, he got dizzy waiting for a fly ball to come down, and any meeting between bat and ball when he got his turn at the plate was purely coincidental. He was on the field only because Coach Matthews, who was employed by the town's Recreation Department, made it a policy to include everybody who wanted to play in the practice sessions.

Yet, for all his lack of physical coordination, Alex knew the rule book backward and forward, and he could cite every strategy that had ever been used in the game of baseball. The trouble was, he made sure that everybody, including the coach, knew that he had the theoretical answer to every problem that could arise in playing the game. This approach might have been helpful if baseball games were played by computers, instead of by people, and if they were merely competitions of programmed strategies against each other.

Fred Dunatos, on the other hand, was one of those people who always had the right instincts on the playing field; and although he might not be able to articulate the rationale or the strategy behind what he did, the results made him a coach's dream—a batter with a keen eye and a strong arm, a fielder who seemed always to be moving in the right direction when the ball was hit. Moreover, he was always a team player, striving not only to cooperate with his comrades on the field, but to make them feel good about their contributions to the overall effort.

The argument between these two men had to do with Fred's stance in the batter's box and the state of his uniform. His batting style was certainly unorthodox, and it was not of the sort that one might put into a book of advice to young players. He would stand in such a relaxed way that he almost seemed to be dozing with the bat on his shoulder, and as the pitcher wound up, his body was turned so far toward the catcher that one would think his head couldn't turn far enough in the other direction to see the ball coming. But such oddities could be forgotten when he batted .375.

Nor did he appear to be particularly graceful on the field, but he seemed always to be there in front of or under the ball. As for his uniform: it looked perpetually like something grabbed out of a bag of Salvation Army clothes. It was amazing that when he wore a uniform, it looked so little like a uniform. It was always dirty, because he insisted on wearing the same clothing game after game when they were winning—and with him playing, they won often. All of these eccentricities drove poor Alex Proskopton to distraction, and he complained bitterly to the coach, the whole team, and anybody else who would listen that Fred's irregularities were not only within themselves disgraceful and embarrassing, but that they were destroying the good order and discipline of the team and were transgressions of the rules of conduct for the game of baseball.

Now, although the league rule book specified that uniforms were to be worn by all teams participating in competition in order to maintain a certain level of appearance for all teams, the rules didn't make clear

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when a uniform badly worn ceased to be counted as a uniform. And although no precedent or parallel could be found for Fred's batting stance, the results of its sole practitioner's efforts were spectacular.

Nevertheless, Alex's strident objections to these transgressions raised doubts in other team members' minds about the value of Fred's contributions to the team; and Fred himself, being a sensitive and conscientious man, had said that he would try to modify his style in the direction of Alex's standards of orthodoxy—and that really worried the coach.

Coach Matthews' perplexity arose from what had developed into somewhat conflicting goals: to include anybody who wanted to take advantage of the good fellowship and the opportunity to develop skills that were offered by participation in the team's activities; and at the same time to mold the team into a group that could do the best of which it was capable in competition.

He wanted to give Alex Proskopton a chance to become a stronger player, but unfortunately Alex did not see himself as in need of this special consideration. Indeed, he saw himself as already a strong member of the team because he was an authority on the rules and precedents of playing baseball, and he deemed that this knowledge put him above dumb jocks like Fred Dunatos—and probably above weak-willed coaches like himself. Bart Matthews thought to himself that he had never seen a person so blinded to his weaknesses by what he assumed were his strengths.

Strange—that aggressive weakness had proved to have some tactical advantages over good natured and humble strength. Not that anybody would object to Fred's looking

less like a homeless person out on the field, but the coach didn't want to encourage a little bully any more than he would a big one.

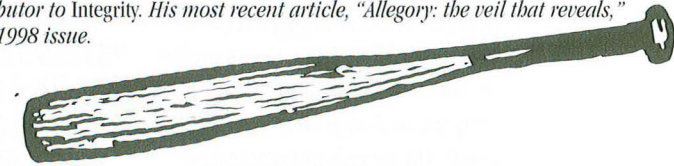
"Just gotta tell Alex to back off, even if the little guy is technically right about Fred's batting stance and uniform," Coach Matthews thought. "Also probably oughta pay the bill for

cleaning Fred's uniform, and drop some gentle hints about the way he looks," he mused.

But as he walked out he concluded: "Sure, 'Playing ball' means trying to keep everybody together somehow; but if push comes to shove, quality has to outweigh quibbles."

*Author's Note:* The basis for the names of the two players is a couple of Greek words in Romans: "Proskopton" from the verb in Rom. 14:21 for stumbling or being made weak; and "Dunatos" from the noun in Rom. 15:1 for a strong brother.

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**BIBLE STUDY**

**Binding together both strong and weak**

Mel Storm

The last decade has witnessed a significant renewed interest in the history of the Restoration Movement in America. The reasons for this interest in history are probably mixed. To some extent it probably indicates that churches of Christ have reached a level of maturity as a religious movement that yearns for a sense of rootedness. We are somewhat like an adult who pursues genealogical research, spending countless hours looking at old photographs

in picture albums, and talking with the elderly in order to learn something of the past. Often genealogical research will uncover facts about one's family history that were previously unknown, at least to him or her. And with every new piece of information, one's understanding of family and even self change. This kind of "enlightenment" also happens in the study of our religious history.

The Restoration Movement has

historically been rooted on an assumption that the primitive apostolic church was a single, almost monolithic, religious movement, in which there existed unity and fellowship, in contrast to the tragedy of the denominationalism of the past few centuries. We in Churches of Christ saw very clearly that Christ's church cannot be divided into a host of competing fellowships and still be the Church of Christ. And yet, this unity has seemed to me to have become almost an elusive dream. Can we expect all Christians will agree on every doctrine and practice in order to be part of this believing community? Can we tolerate diversity without destroying the unity we so desperately want and need? Do we risk our status as a Church of Christ if we allow or choose not to eliminate the diversity? These are important questions which must be answered only after much prayer, study, and reflection.

### **Historical baggage**

I come to these questions with my historical baggage as a lifelong member of Churches of Christ. My mother and father were reared in a sect of the Churches of Christ commonly known as the Sommerites. Named after Daniel Sommer, a preacher of the mid-19th century, this group would not fellowship any congregation of the Churches of Christ who had a paid local minister, supported orphan homes and Christian colleges, and used printed Bible study material for Sunday School. In fact, one of my ancestors, Walter Storm, was an original signer of the famous Sand Creek Declaration,

which effectively gave birth to this sect. As young adults, my parents made the decision to join with a congregation which had a located minister, supported Christian orphan homes, and whose children sometimes attended Christian colleges. Congregations like this one were sometimes called "college churches" by the Sommerites. That decision eventually led to the disfellowship of my parents by their home congregation, which the other sister Sommerite congregations supported. For many years, they were treated like outsiders by family members and former friends, simply because they elected to be a part of a different congregation. What is even more tragic is that my parents' story has been repeated many times over.

As I reflect on the experiences of my parents as well as others, I realize how far churches of Christ are from the unity which we believe is portrayed in the New Testament. In fact, I believe that a closer look at the scriptures will reveal that the early Christians often faced serious threats to their unity. Furthermore, unity or fellowship was perhaps the primary challenge these early believers faced. The clearest example of this struggle is in Paul's letters to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians opens with an explicit statement of this issue.

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and

the same purpose. For it has been reported to me from Chloe's household that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that: each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or, "I follow Cephas," or, "I belong to Christ."

(1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

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### **If Paul had written this letter in our day, the above three cliques might be mainstream, middle class suburban Christians, college educated or scholarly Christians, and conservative and traditionalist Christians, respectively.**

The exact nature of the so-called parties or cliques are a matter of scholarly debate. Perhaps the most common explanation is that the Paul party consisted of the original converts of Paul, especially those who shared Paul's view that one is justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law. The followers of Apollos may have had a particular affinity for the use of rhetoric and the allegorical method of Old Testament interpretation. The Cephas people may have represented the traditional Jewish perspective, especially in areas of diet, ritual and religious observances. If Paul had written this letter in our day, the above three cliques might be mainstream, middle class suburban Christians, college educated or scholarly Christians, and conservative and traditionalist Christians, respectively.

Those who claimed to be of Christ were listed along with other groups which promoted division. So I suspect that the Christ party were those who claimed a special relationship with Christ, by virtue of their experience of the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy, and by their overall claim that they possessed the most profound understanding of the Gospel. Even today, there are people who assert that they possess the true essence of the Gospel, in either knowledge of correct doctrine or some believed spiritual experience of God.

In penetrating sarcasm, Paul declared:

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we disrepute. To this present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed, and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we

endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this very day.

(1 Corinthians 4:8-13)

If Paul was not quoting from these spiritual elitists, he apparently was at least expressing the substance of their position. The point is that some of the Christians at Corinth considered themselves to be more spiritual, more knowledgeable, and more enlightened than most of their fellow members. Not only did they think this way about themselves, they also behaved like it. Paul accused them of elevating wisdom over the simple truth of the Gospel, tolerating sexually immoral conduct, making distinctions between the haves and the have-nots within the assembly, and boldly exercising their Christian freedom with little or no regard for the moral and spiritual convictions of others.

### **Christian freedom**

The matter of Christian freedom is specifically discussed in 1 Corinthians 8-10, in which Paul addressed the question concerning eating meat offered to an idol. In 8:7-12, Paul refers to those who are weak or have a weak conscience. In this passage a

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weak member was one whose conscience would not allow him or her to eat food that had been offered to

an idol. This weak conscience may be the result of the baggage of paganism and idolatry which some Gentile converts most likely carried with them. It could also refer to those Jewish brethren who felt the ceremonial statutes in the Mosaic Law still had authority for the Christian. While Paul apparently identified himself with the more enlightened perspective concerning sacrificial food, he states that he will not eat if in so doing he has spiritually injured a fellow Christian. He argues that all Christians should have the same concern for those with different perspectives.

In a similar vein, Paul in Romans 14:1-15:13 exhorts that both the strong and weak in faith can still have fellowship with one another despite their different understandings. The strong or so-called enlightened must not look down upon, nor hold in contempt, their more restrictive or weak in faith brother. Neither must the more restrictive member judge or condemn the brother who freely exercises his freedom in Christ. Rather, both are to welcome the other just as Christ welcomed them, and leave it to God to render judgment. The point is that a Christian should be secure and gracious enough to allow for some diversity within his/her church. This diversity could be racial and ethnic identity, education, wealth and social class. It can also be seen in a variety of perspectives about faith, opinions about certain doctrinal issues (the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature and practice of Christian worship, the role of women in the church, marriage and divorce, the nature of the

second coming, and a host of other issues). But the question is, how do we provide for healthy diversity in our congregations, without compromising on Scriptures' requirement for salvation and membership in the Church? I believe that at least part of the answer is found in Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians.

### **Unity is paramount**

First, Paul makes clear that unity within the Church must be given high priority. He calls on his readers to eliminate the divisions and learn to agree and speak the same thing. Those who consider themselves spiritually superior to others are called to practice humility and consideration

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toward others. Moreover, the moral and spiritual needs of a brother or sister must take on greater importance than the exercise of one's freedom in Christ. On the other hand, Paul reminds us that a theology which stresses the keeping of rules and traditions is a theology founded on weak faith. It is weak, presumably, because it holds that a right relationship with God is available only to the person who observes certain acts of obedience which in the doing make one worthy of justification. Strong faith is characterized by a freedom in Christ in which rightness with God is celebrated as a gracious gift from God, and not a reward for some

meritorious deed.

With this perspective, there can be no place for arrogance, self-centeredness, and self-righteous attitudes. Paul said it best when he wrote:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NRSV)

Paul told the so-called strong in faith in 1 Corinthians 8:1b, that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Thus the virtue that Paul was calling for the strong to show to their weak brethren is love. If I love my brother or sister, then I will not insist on my own way, nor will I be resentful or irritable toward them. I will be patient and kind toward those whose theology differs from mine and will not act in an arrogant manner to them. In the final analysis, love will cause me to desire only the best for my fellow Christian and I will never give up on them.

However, this call to love is not only for the "strong in faith" or the so-called progressive Christian, it is also for the brother or sister who is more strongly tied to tradition and a religion of rules. They, too, must extend love and acceptance to their brothers and sisters. The preservation of unity and fellowship should be just as much the priority of the

“weak” or traditionalist member, as it is for the “strong in faith.” They must accept the fact that salvation is by grace through faith. This means that God saves by grace imperfect people who do not deserve to be

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saved. While all Christians acknowledge that God does not expect perfection, it is always tempting to determine which “sins” are more important to avoid. But this leads to either attitudes of religious elitism or even complacency. Filled with the knowledge of God’s grace, the “weak member” can regard the “strong member” as a child of God despite their differences. Moreover, God’s grace allows churches to experiment with different and new ideas and programs, knowing that mistakes do not in themselves disqualify from being God’s church, and they can be corrected.

Whether one is strong or weak, progressive or traditionalist, liberal or conservative, he or she must be committed to the unity of the Christian community. But this unity will not be found in compromised theology, nor in forced compliance to a set of doctrines, nor in church traditions, and certainly not in disregarding the convictions of others. Rather unity is found in love, unconditional love.

### Unconditional love

One might point out that if love is the unifying factor, then there is no need for any concern for doctrinal correctness or faithful response to God’s revealed will. This would be true if this love is nothing more than the love all people have, whether Christian or not. But Jesus calls us to a new love that only believers can experience. He said,

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Jesus’ words can mean either that our love for each other should be in imitation of Jesus’ love for us, or that we love in response to our experience of Jesus’ love. Whichever meaning is correct, Christian love is unique because it is rooted in Jesus’ love for us. Moreover, this love is to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian community. In addition, Paul himself often pointed to condition of the heart as the primary grounds for fellowship.

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Certainly, there can be no fellowship for the person who rejects Jesus as the Son of God, or denies the resurrection of Jesus, or insists on living an immoral lifestyle. But for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, unity always begins with unconditional love. We will never fully agree with each other on every interpretation of Scripture. Some of us will appreciate the value of traditions while others want to introduce new ideas. I might not even like what some of my brothers and sisters are doing.

Some of us will be weak in faith, while others will be strong. These differences and others have been, and always will be, with us. But we can love each other, despite our differences. We can accept each other even when we disagree. If God’s grace can cover all my sin and make possible for me to be a child of God, so must His grace also cover our imperfect understanding and application of His word. If God can extend this grace to us, let us extend grace to one another. Amen.

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## PERSPECTIVES

### Answers to questions often asked

Buff Scott, Jr.

**Editor’s note:** We subscribe to several regular e-mails from Restoration Movement thinkers, including Buff Scott’s. We wanted to share with you an excerpt from one of his most recent missives.



In reference to Christian unity, are you saying we should unite with brothers and sisters in error?

A. If there’s any other kind, I’ve never seen or met them, and I’ve been around quite a few. If there’s a group of Christians out there that has conquered all knowledge relating to doctrine, please point me in their direction so that I can avoid them. I

get real nervous in the presence of the unblemished!

Q. Are you saying doctrinal differences should not be discussed?

A. No, that’s not what I’m saying. Differences, especially the “bone-rubbing” kind, should be discussed openly and candidly, but only in a spirit of meekness and goodwill. If no consensus is reached, however, we ought not reject each other. The



brother or sister whose views differ from ours is very possibly as honest and sincere in his or her persuasions as we are in ours.

If we reject such a believer, we reject one whom the Lord accepts. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you. . ." (Rom. 15:7).

The latter part of Paul's statement is interesting: ". . . in order to bring praise to God." When we reject fellow believers because their conception of truth does not coincide with ours, we fail to "bring praise to God." That's a serious matter.

**Q.** You seem to be saying that we should accept and fellowship any and all "professed believers," even though some of their doctrines and practices undermine the Christian faith. Is this assessment valid?

**A.** Your assessment is invalid. But I would add that there are limitations to acceptance. If a "professed believer's" doctrinal stance subverts the Christian faith by denying that Jesus came in the flesh, we are not to "welcome them" (2 John 7:11). On another note, one who has fallen victim to immorality and turns a deaf ear to corrective counseling is to be expelled (1 Cor. 5).

There's one other reason to reject a brother or sister—divisiveness (Titus 3:10-11). A divisive person deliberately and knowingly sows seeds of division. The end result is another

church or denomination. "You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned" (verse 11).

**Q.** Then you make a distinction between "salvational" and "non-salvational" doctrines?

**A.** Exactly! Most of our divisions occur over non-salvational issues. If God has not made the question at hand a matter of salvation, we dare not make it a matter of fellowship. To do so is to become divisive.

**Q.** You teach that God has children in most denominations, and that they should be recognized and acknowledged. How can we do that without approving of and supporting those denominations?

**A.** We must not confuse Christian fellowship and acceptance with endorsement. We accept and fellowship the brother or sister, not the errors nor the denomination. If acceptance translates into endorsement, we would not be able to accept and fellowship any believer without subscribing to their theological hang-ups, whatever they might be. The very idea is illogical and reeks of spiritual illiteracy. Unity must be based on diversity instead of conformity. The fact that our intellectual and perceptual levels vary establishes diversity.

I suggest that if we relish conformity, let us wait until heaven becomes a reality.



## Where, exactly, is the beef?

*Jerry L. Smith*

I have recently chosen to abstain from eating red meat. I decided to do this after I read a novel about the poor management of slaughterhouses, which could potentially set in motion a chain of events resulting in life-threatening bacteria being passed on to those who eat the meat.

This article is not a commentary on the dangers of eating beef. It's a good illustration, though, for a life application of the issue of the stronger versus the weaker member. The simplistic view presented here is not a "matter of faith" in my Christian walk; however, sometimes lessons can be learned by looking beyond the simple and digging deep beneath the surface to make the personal application in one's life.

As a caveat to this "life application," please be reminded that God's kingdom (both earthly and heavenly) is not about eating red meat (Rom. 14:17)! However, the principles for the "weaker" and "stronger" brothers and sisters are just as valid in 1999 as they were in Paul's day. My issue with red meat has nothing to do with my salvation or with your salvation. And don't most disputes between Christian brethren arise from deeper issues than the supposed dispute? Aren't there usually underlying "thorns" that

cause the disagreement to occur? I contend that my choice to not eat red meat (I truly like steak!) is honestly about my not wanting to die a horrible, painful death from E-coli. So, brothers and sisters, when we disagree about non-doctrinal issues, let's first learn about the "real" underlying "beef" that is causing the dispute. God's kingdom is not about controversial issues such as the exercising of Christian liberty. God is pleased with our pursuit of righteousness, peace, joy and edification (Rom. 14: 17-19). Therefore, how do we get along with one another, despite our differences?

### How do we get along?

Shortly after I made the decision to refrain from eating red meat, a friend served me beef roast for dinner! I reminded her in a nice way that I was no longer eating red meat. After apologizing to the point of almost begging my forgiveness (she truly forgot my newfound "abstinence"), she assured me that her "error" would not happen again (at least until I chose otherwise). Was she putting a "stumbling block" in the way of my weakness? Of course not. The point is that we communicated with each other honestly and kindly. She didn't sneer at my decision to abstain, and I wasn't horrified

at her wanton disregard for the life and health of her family by her incredibly liberal food choices. Can you see how you can apply this mutual respect to any "dispute" in our churches today, whether it be singing during communion, having women participate in the worship service, or instrumental music? My friend continues to serve red meat. I continue to abstain. We continue to love each other.

### **Stumbling blocks are intentional**

When Paul strongly admonishes his readers not to put a stumbling block in another's way (Rom. 14:13), the word "determine" suggests an active and conscious decision, perhaps motivated by a wish for the brother or sister to "trip" over his or her own difference of opinion. Paul's encouragement follows his strong discourse on judgment (vs. 10-12). One can only deliberately create a "stumbling block" after first passing judgment! The sin that is committed is created by first judging our fellow Christians. The passage here has nothing to do with "accidental" or "forgetful" acts done in ignorance of someone's weakness. Paul's first warning is to avoid judgment of another. If we do not judge, we will not cause our brother or sister to stumble over differences of opinion.

Current differences of opinion in the church today can range from such issues as the usage of our buildings to how far we will extend the role of women in worship. To avoid a "stumbling block" as a result of judgment against another member, one

must first be aware of the area of disagreement. For example, if one "stronger" member believes that women can actively participate in a worship service, he or she should use wisdom in broaching the subject around a "weaker" member who may strongly believe that the role of women is a black and white issue and not open for an opinion. The subject may be volatile to the "weaker" member and could cause a dispute that would be irreparable and of no value in building up the body, creating a lack of unity. Brothers and sisters, first be sensitive to each other's areas of "weakness;" one cannot judge another's opinion without first knowing a member's "hot issue;" don't assume that each member believes the same way on every matter of opinion.

By the way, one might define the "stronger" member as the one who gives in to the other out of love or honor to the "weaker" member. The "stronger" may also be defined as the one who makes the choice to love rather than continue to argue over the initial area of opinion.

### **Do we need to agree on everything?**

Despite the fact my friend had beef roast for our dinner, the meal had other things for me to enjoy: carrots, potatoes, green beans and apple pie for dessert! Did I need to eat the beef to enjoy the meal? No; I didn't touch it. Did I leave her home hungry for more food? Au contraire. I was full. There is a lesson here, too!

Sometimes as Christians, we believe we need to agree on *everything*

before we can fellowship with each other. We use our "areas of agreement" as a gauge to judge whether or not we will worship, fellowship, work or evangelize together. Paul lets us know that this is not the case.

After his discourse on judgment, he helps us refocus by stressing the kingdom's goal (Rom 14:17). The person who pleases God is one who sees beyond the "surface" areas of opinion to "pursue the things that make for peace and edification" (14:17-19).

There are plenty of things on which we can "feast" in our church body besides "beef roast" -there are carrots, potatoes and apple pie! Let's focus on the things that fill our spirits and cause one another to grow and be filled with joy! Don't we all agree that our worship services should be

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### **The person who pleases God is one who sees beyond the "surface" areas of opinion to "pursue the things that make for peace and edification"**

filled with prayer, sharing of God's Word and singing our praises to God? Aren't the times of worship and fellowship so wonderful that words cannot express our inner joy? Why do we argue over areas of opinion? Don't these disagreements taint the beautiful times spent in fellowship with God and each other? Our world is hungry for peace and joy; it's very easy to live in disharmony with each other and the world around us; it takes love to worship in harmony with one another. We will never go

away hungry as long as we are "feasting" on the things that create peace, joy, love and unity. As long as we are filled with peace and joy with God and one another, then the world around us will also want to experience the love, joy, peace and unity.

### **Do weaker people get stronger?**

So, you ask, will I ever "grow up" and learn to again eat red meat? How much responsibility do I have to the USDA and the butchers in my city? Maybe I'll never "grow up" and will never again eat red meat!

In 1 Cor. 8, Paul addresses the idea of exercising our Christian liberty. He uses the example of eating food sacrificed to idols. The core idea appears to be that the readers all shared the same knowledge about the "rules" of not eating food sacrificed to idols. Having knowledge is great, but without love, knowledge is worthless (vs. 1-3, 7-9).

I have a responsibility to "research" the rules by which I use my Christian liberty. Maybe I need to do more reading on USDA regulations and the meat processing industry before I choose never again to eat red meat. Perhaps I need more positive education on the good side of beef preparation. Maybe I need to just lighten up and remember how good a hamburger on the grill can smell!

### **Responsibilities come with holding firm opinions**

In the same way, each Christian has the responsibility and liberty to use the tools available to educate him or herself in the more contro-

versal issues in the church (vs. 7). Paul says that not all have chosen to exercise the gift of liberty, but are content with their old way of thinking. Perhaps their conscience is weak; possibly as a result of a lack of knowledge or a desire to be mentally or spiritually challenged. Perhaps they really, seriously believe they are right. I can remain content in my old way of thinking, but it is not my brother or sister's responsibility or obligation to shield me from spiritual controversies that result from my single-sided thinking. Our only "obligation" to each other is to love!

#### › Degrees of deference

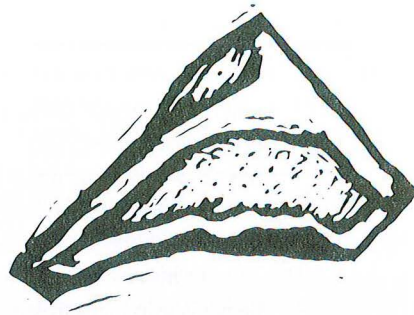
Yes, we should "defer" to one another out of love, but how far should we carry our deference? I'm ultimately responsible for my response to your opinion and vice versa. Sometimes as members of the same body we may need to "agree to disagree." Just because we may choose to hold to our opinions (or traditions) doesn't mean that we're failing to love or to defer to one another!

#### › Practical applications

We shouldn't be afraid to explore new ways of worshipping or partici-

### Don't decide for someone else or for the church body what's right or wrong!

pating in the body because we may "offend" someone! You and I cannot live in a protective shell with one another simply because we're worried we may offend a "weaker" member! Take chances. Worry about the fallout



of those chances only *after* learning of an offense against another member. We all have the same Bible and the same Spirit available to us so that we can learn and apply what God has spoken and taught. Therefore, you and I need to read and study the scriptures and decide for ourselves how we will stand on issues of opinion. Don't decide for someone else or for the church body what's right or wrong! We don't disagree on the basic teachings on salvation and elements of worship!

If I choose never again to eat red meat, it's not because I don't have the resources available to ground myself in my conviction; it's because I've made the choice to exercise my liberty. If a brother or sister chooses to remain firm in a conviction, it's not my responsibility to "point out" his or her error. We can each challenge and study for ourselves the issues on which we disagree.

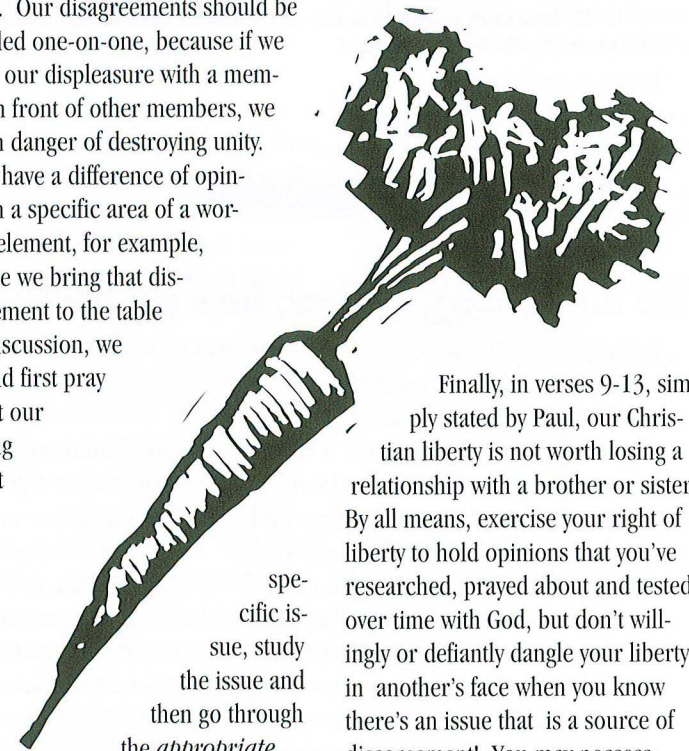
What is my responsibility to a brother or sister who doesn't see eye-to-eye with me? What should be our response to each other if we both have studied our Bibles on a specific issue and still disagree on the interpretation? Paul addresses this question in 1 Cor. 8: 1-3, 8-9 and Rom. 14:20. Love. Read that again: Love. All the knowledge in the world (for

or against any issue) doesn't win the battle in God's eyes. What pleases God is love for each other despite our differences of opinion. The knowledge that bridges the gap between Christians, churches and the world is the knowledge of God that comes through loving Him and one another. If we disagree with each other on an issue of opinion, we should not carry these differences into our worship services or fellowship with each other. Our disagreements should be handled one-on-one, because if we show our displeasure with a member in front of other members, we are in danger of destroying unity. If we have a difference of opinion in a specific area of a worship element, for example, before we bring that disagreement to the table for discussion, we should first pray about our feeling about the

displeasure!

Paul is very emphatic in verse 8 when he states that it's not our food (issues) that makes God pleased. He doesn't need us to be "right" or "wrong" on our opinions—he wants us to always do what's right by each other - it's always right to love! We're not always going to be right, nor will we always be wrong!

### Christian relationships are priceless



Finally, in verses 9-13, simply stated by Paul, our Christian liberty is not worth losing a relationship with a brother or sister. By all means, exercise your right of liberty to hold opinions that you've researched, prayed about and tested over time with God, but don't willfully or defiantly dangle your liberty in another's face when you know there's an issue that is a source of disagreement! You may possess more knowledge or maturity in a specific area where your brother or sister lacks strength, but his or her soul is more valuable than your opinion! Your opinions may be influenced by your own personal preferences; you may prefer clapping in a song during a worship service! Or,

specific issue, study the issue and then go through the *appropriate* channels to air our opinion. We should expect the same standard of behavior in front of each other as we would from those of the world; our differences of opinion do not give us license to disparage each other up one side and down another where others can see our

perhaps your traditional background may influence your desire for total silence during the Lord's Supper, whereas our more "liberal" members may enjoy having a song sung during the Lord's Supper.

Neither preference is wrong; scripture does not address either of these preferences. In all things, the command is to love each other; in our preferences, opinions or tradi-

tions!

Let's learn to love and accept each other as we strive to study the issues that confront us in today's churches. God's kingdom is more important than tradition and opinion. And by the way, eat your next steak dinner for me. I won't be offended.

*Jeryl Smith is a graduate of Rochester College in Rochester, Michigan. She is very active in several ministries at the Heritage Church of Christ in Clawson, Michigan, most notably signing worship services and Bible classes for the hearing impaired.*



## MEDITATION

### "He ain't heavy, Father; he's my brother."

*Ivan Jameson*

It was in the 1940's. I was a young teen. We had some company on the farm where I grew up. Some of the older teens wanted to see a movie at the local movie house. It was Sunday. After much persuasion (begging?), my Dad, reluctantly, gave me permission to go to one of the few Sunday movies that I've seen in my life. It was Spencer Tracy in *Men of Boys' Town*. One of the lines that I seem to remember, and which was, or later became, a slogan for this Catholic home for boys, came from a kid, trudging through the snow, towards the facility, with a smaller boy on his back. In response to a question from a priest who ap-

proached them, he uttered, what I think may be a profound statement that can give us an insight into Christian love and brotherhood, "He ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother."

Some years later, when I was a student in one of "our" Bible Colleges, I got another glimpse of the same kind of love and devotion. It looked like a small share-cropper's shack. On the front porch sat an obviously overweight young lady, probably in her twenties or thirties. She wore a diaper and a little top that resembled such that small children in those days wore. She was tied in a rocking chair. The first time I saw her an older woman was lovingly

feeding her with a spoon. Later I witnessed some younger folk, I figured they were her younger siblings, feeding her, rocking her, playing with her. Her parents loved her. That could easily be seen. Her brothers and sisters loved her. That also was obvious. She was restrained in the chair by a soft rope, apparently to keep her sitting upright. She was handicapped. "Retarded" was the word that we used in those days. She had to be treated, cared for, like an infant. It had probably been going on for years. *But she was a part of the family!*

She was treated with respect, love, gentleness, and grace by the rest of the family. I can almost hear one of those siblings saying to their father, "She ain't heavy, father, she's my sister."

Our Heavenly Father may be looking at us as we deal with the "weak" brothers and sisters. He, who "so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son" for us, loves His children . . . even the weak, retarded, ones who "by this time . . . ought to be teachers, . . . have need again for someone to teach (them) the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and . . . have come to need milk and not solid food." (Hebrews 5:12 NASB) When our loving heavenly Father, looks lovingly at us giving a hand to that weaker brother, are we able to answer his query, "He ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother." Do we see that weaker brother as **a part of the family?**

As I review the nearly fifty-two years since that evening I made my

commitment to the Lord Jesus and was baptized in that swimming hole next to the railroad trestle on the "Red Devil Ditch", I sometimes can almost feel my face turning red with embarrassment over how weak and "stupid" many of my notions and actions were as I attempted to walk with the Lord. But he had accepted me. He nurtured me through his Holy Spirit whom he gave to me when I made that commitment. And, if the scripture is correct, he expects me to accept others just as he accepted me. Therefore, as stated in Romans chapters 14 and 15, where the relationships between the "weak" and the "strong" is discussed, I should "accept . . . another, just as Christ also accepted (me) to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7, NASB).

How did "Christ accept" me? While I was "still helpless" . . . "ungodly" he died for me. "God demonstrated his own love toward (me), in that while (I was) yet (a) sinner Christ died for (me)." Even "while (I was) an enemy (of God) (I was) reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:6-10, NASB).

So, "Who (am I) to judge the servant of another?", and " . . . you, why do you judge your brother? Or, you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." "Therefore let us not judge

*(continued on page 26)*

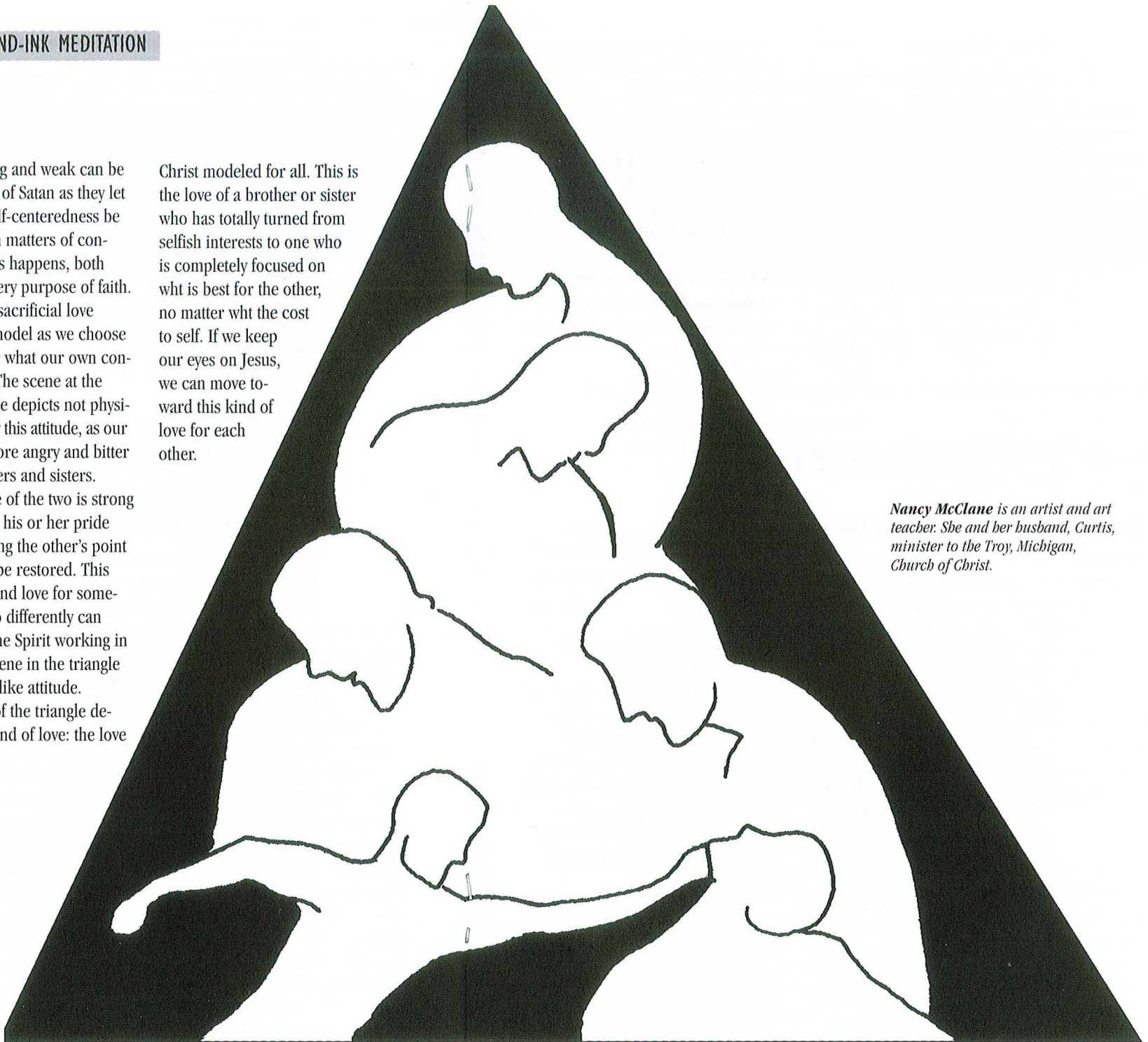


Both the strong and weak can be come pawns of Satan as they let pride and self-centeredness be their only focus in matters of conscience. When this happens, both lose sight of the very purpose of faith. Our Lord's act of sacrificial love ceases to be the model as we choose sides and fight for what our own conscience dictates. The scene at the base of the triangle depicts not physically but spiritually this attitude, as our hearts become more angry and bitter toward our brothers and sisters.

Only when one of the two is strong enough to give up his or her pride and focus on seeing the other's point of view can unity be restored. This kind of empathy and love for someone who thinks so differently can only come from the Spirit working in us. The second scene in the triangle depicts this Christlike attitude.

The pinnacle of the triangle depicts the purest kind of love: the love

Christ modeled for all. This is the love of a brother or sister who has totally turned from selfish interests to one who is completely focused on what is best for the other, no matter what the cost to self. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can move toward this kind of love for each other.



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(continued from page 23)

one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's or sister's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother or sister is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. . . for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

. . . he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." (Romans 14:4, 10, 13, 14-18, NASB)

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. . . Now we who are strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength not just to please ourselves. . . wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Romans 14:1; 15:1, 7, NASB).

Ivan Jameson ministers to fellow Christians through his Ivan Jameson Ministries, Austin, TX.



## A CLOSER LOOK

### On faith, liberty, and love

Keith Brumley

**I**n matters of faith—unity; in matters of opinion—liberty; in all things—love.

This cherished motto, though borrowed from 16th-century Protestant Reformers, has from the beginning of our movement served as a summary of the key concepts of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement (RM). The first clause agrees with the apostle Paul, who in 1 Co. 1 5:1-8 gives us those essential core beliefs of the Christian faith, upon which we must all agree and take our stand. The last clause sets before us the essential attitude and principle of action for Christians, i.e., love, as com-

manded by our Lord Jesus (Matt. 22:37-40; Jn. 13:34-35).

All could give a hearty "Amen" to the first and last clauses of this famous RM motto. But the middle clause tends to receive less attention among the heirs of the RM than it did for the early leaders of our Movement. It's harder to get a handle on and, apparently, harder to put into practice.

Our Movement is anchored to the Scriptures. We are a Bible-believing bunch. If it were not so, I would not be involved in it. I agree that the Bible is God's written revelation to humanity. It is clear in its witness to God's grand plan to save sinners

through the giving of his Son and Spirit. On this all agree. However, we don't always agree on how to interpret passages that are less than clear. Equal in integrity and reverence for the Word of God, devoted disciples differ. Convictions clash! How, then, with conflicting convictions, can we put into practice the statement, "*in matters of opinion—liberty*"?

#### Opinions and convictions

Paul in Romans 14:1 writes, "Accept those whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters (NIV)." The NASB translates that last phrase "not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." Someone once humorously remarked that the difference between a mere

mere "opinion" for these Jewish Christians. They were "badges" of their identity—deeply ingrained upon their psyches. In a Greco-Roman society where it was often difficult for religious Jews to keep their identity intact, these matters (food, special days, circumcision, etc.) were the ways in which they outwardly expressed their faithfulness to God. These habits of the heart didn't disappear when they confessed their faith in Christ as Messiah and put him on in baptism!

And when their Gentile brothers and sisters (and possibly some "law-free" Jewish Christians) neither shared nor practiced these deeply-held convictions, disunity erupted in the Roman house churches. One can imagine the leaders of the house churches struggling to maintain unity between the Christians while the debate heated and people polarized around personalities and positions. Evidently, some were casting a condemning eye towards their less "scrupulous" brothers and sisters, while the "law-free" crowd became rather condescending to their less "enlightened" members (v. 2). These are the circumstances to which Paul directs his remarks in Romans 14:1-15:7.

#### A proud heritage

Before we look at Paul's suggested solution to this situation in Rome, let me say this. I am proud of my RM heritage. Our movement began as an attempt at uniting Christians upon the essence of Christianity—upon our shared faith in the person and work of Christ Jesus. It

#### That we exist as a "divided unity movement" should be scandalous for us all.

"opinion" and a deeply-held "conviction" is simple: if *you* hold it, it's merely an opinion. If *I* hold it, it's a deeply-held conviction. What is less humorous is when fellow Christians divide the Body of Christ by insisting that all hold to *their* particular set of convictions—or else. This is what was apparently happening in Rome among those Christians who were mainly of Jewish heritage and those Christians from a Greco-Roman heritage (Gentile). The Jewish believers were still "law-abiding"—in the sense that they held to the Mosaic food restrictions (14:2) as well as following the Jewish liturgical calendar (1 4:5-6). These were not simply matters of

began as a movement *within* a Christendom divided over a myriad of opinions and convictions. The call was to unite on our shared faith in Jesus, agreeing to obey his clear commands, while respecting one another's freedom in Christ to disagree on "disputable matters." Speaking, then, as one proud of my RM heritage, I am *not* proud of the way we, as heirs of the movement, have lived out the legacy handed on to us. That we exist as a "divided unity movement" should be scandalous for us all.

From a panoramic viewpoint, we're split into three major divisions: the "a cappella" churches of Christ, the "independent" Christian with ("a cappella" churches), and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Looking at the division I'm most familiar with (the a cappella churches), we're even further fragmented. Cited in the "Key to Directory Abbreviations" of Dr. Mac Lynn's *Churches of Christ in the US* (1994 ed.) are over a dozen major subdivisions of divided a cappella churches. Some of these divisions are more serious than others, but many within these divisions would not recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ!

### ›Why?

The question begging to be asked is "Why?" The only answer available is that we have not held to the cherished position stated in the motto "*in matters of opinion -liberty*." We, as "heirs" of the Stone-Campbell tradition, need desperately to reclaim this motto in today's church!

A recent study has shown that the

passage most influential in Thomas Campbell's mind when penning the *Declaration and Address* was Romans 14:1-15:7. While a full exposition of this important text is not the purpose of this article, the Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul had some important things to say to the first-century churches of Rome that are equally applicable to the churches of today. Hear some of these statements from Paul's pen:

- Accept those whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters (14:1)
- You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Why do you look down on your brother or sister? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (14:10).
- Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in another believer's way. (14:13)
- Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (14:19)
- Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

These statements speak volumes to our situation today. Paul told the Roman Christians—both those of Jewish descent and those of Greco-Roman descent—to neither condemn one another nor look condescendingly upon one another based on convictions held over "disputable matters." Remember, we're not talking about trivial disagreements over the color of the "mosaic to be laid" in

their church building! Paul was addressing deeply-held convictions (on both sides) which divided Christians and threatened the very existence of the church's witness and work in Rome. And Paul's directions are clear: "Children, don't divide over these 'matters of conviction!' Accept one another as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God!"

### What about us?

What about us? Are we prepared to learn this ancient lesson? Are we prepared to reclaim our heritage of unity and put into practice the principle of "*in matters of opinion—liberty*"? Would you, my "a cappella" colleague, be prepared to look at your brothers and sisters in the "independent" Christian churches, who use instruments in worship, and say "*in matters of opinion — liberty*, recognizing that the Kingdom of God isn't about "*eating or drinking*" (or singing with or without instruments), but about "*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (14:17)? Would you, in the "independent" churches, look toward those in the Disciples of Christ, who have chosen to organize themselves along a different model, and affirm them as brothers and sisters in Christ? On a more congregational level, would you agree to disagree with that brother or sister with whom you can't agree 100% regarding "marriage, divorce and remarriage" . . . "worship styles" . . . "the role of women in the church" . . .

celebrating special days, etc.? Can we agree that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God*, while striving to maintain *the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*?

Thomas Campbell agreed with the apostle Paul in that matters of opinion, and even matters of deeply-held convictions, ought not separate brothers and sisters in Christ. *Do we agree with them?* Will agreeing mean we'll all worship in the same way or organize ourselves similarly? Will it mean we'll have to stop thinking for ourselves and see "eye-to-eye" on all the issues (yielding to the lowest common denominator)? NO!

Are we free to disagree—to hold different convictions on these matters? YES!! Are we free to condemn one another or act condescendingly toward one another when convictions clash? NO! We must grant one another liberty in all areas where there is not a clear "*thus says the Lord*." One such clear command is "*accept one another as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God*." Dare we be so bold as to obey?

We've become too comfortable with what our forebears loathed—dividing and subdividing over our convictions regarding "disputable matters." Repentance is called for. Let us do so reclaiming our historical position: ***In matters of faith—unity; in matters of opinion—liberty; in all things—love.***

*Keith Brumley and his wife, Margaret, minister to the Convoy Avenue Church of Christ in Halifax, Nova Scotia. They have three children. Keith is also editor of Joint Heirs, a RM newsletter promoting unity.*



## Bending the Twig

Laquita Higgs

**T**he two “t’s”: time and talk. Both are important in raising children, according to Tim and Sharon Kostaroff. The commitment of the Kostaroff family to Christ has impressed me over the years, so I asked them to tell us about their development as a Christian family.

The two oldest children are now teenagers, and Phil and Kim, along with 12-year-old Karen, talked about how their parents not only demonstrated moral values, but talked to them often about the problems they would face in the world. When asked about how their parents taught them to be responsible, they mentioned that they were always urged to finish whatever they started, to do the best work they could, to be orderly, and to keep promises that were made. They have regular chores, and they make their own beds everyday.

The children have always attended public schools, and they recognize the importance of their parents’ involvement. Tim and Sharon have always attended special events at school, and Sharon is active in the parents’ association and has conducted an after-school Bible Club in the school for several years.

There have been restrictions and punishment when necessary. The children are allowed only one hour of TV on school days. They were

never allowed to watch cartoons, and movies are rare. They sometimes play video games, but have never been allowed to play the games which feature violence and killing.

Kim reported that they were first taught to pray by repeating after their parents. Phil says they prayed a lot—before every meal and at bedtime. Now they are old enough to pray on their own and to read the Bible every day, which they are trying to discipline themselves to do. They also credit the influence of committed Sunday School teachers, and they are especially enjoying their present teacher, who is open and shares his own weaknesses, and who gets the students to think and talk about their relationship to God.

### A parenting philosophy to emulate

After the children left the room, I asked Tim and Sharon to articulate their parenting philosophy. They mentioned the modeling of godly behavior, parents first making sure that their own spiritual lives are in order and that they are extremely honest with their children, even when it means admitting to them that they have been wrong. Tim and Sharon spend a lot of time talking to their children. They always have an evening meal together, and they sometimes sit around the table long

after they have finished eating so that they can continue discussing current issues and the happenings of the day. Tim emphasized that this process started early; for example, he said that when the children were little and accompanied him to the supermarket, he constantly talked to them about what they were doing and what they needed to buy.

Whenever they were ready to go out visiting, the children were told what they could expect and the kind of behavior that was required. “Involve them in conversations,” Tim says, believing that it helps the children to feel that they are a part of the family. Now that Phil is a teenager, Tim and Phil enjoy golfing together, a time which Tim uses to talk about the temptations that his son faces as he gets ready to go to college next year. Nothing is barred from those conversations. They talk about decisions and choices to be made, and Tim is open to any question that Phil might ask.

### What it means to be a family

Tim and Sharon talk to the children about what it means to be a family. The children receive allowances, but the money is not payment for

### The goal is self-discipline and helping the children to understand themselves and the problems within themselves that they need to work on.

chores. The children are to do chores, and without being reminded every day, because they are a part of the family; on the other hand, praise for jobs well done is given liberally.

As children get older and are able to handle it, sharing family problems—and letting them be a part of the solution, if possible—can help the children know that they are respected members of the family. And what about the times when the children misbehave? Consistency in expectations is important; for example, Tim notes, don’t let a small child roam around after he has been put to bed. Make fair rules and enforce them.

Both Tim and Sharon are disciplinarians. Spanking was used occasionally when the children were little, but now they are deprived of some privilege when punishment is necessary. The goal is self-discipline and helping the children to understand themselves and the problems within themselves that they need to work on. And quarrels among the children? The parents try to teach the children to use common sense and have respect for one another, but when a quarrel breaks out, they try to let the children work it out. If that fails, Tim warns them that this is how wars start!—and they require that the children spend some time apart, each in his or her own room.

Tim also emphasizes a practical matter: growing teens need a lot of rest—more than they want to admit—and the Kostaroffs have found that quarrels often stem from a lack of proper rest. Tim is adamant about the necessity to spend time with children. “You only have eighteen years,” he cautions. After that, he says, parents can spend time on themselves, but while the children



are at home, parents don't have any business getting heavily involved in

**... parents don't have any business getting heavily involved in outside activities, even in worthwhile church work, if it is going to take a parent away from family too much.**

outside activities, even in worthwhile church work, if it is going to take a parent away from family too much.

#### ›Books

I asked if any books had been helpful to the Kostaroffs, and Sharon mentioned several of the James Dobson books. They also showed me the devotional book that they are currently using as a family: *Life Training: Devotions for Parents and Teens* by Joe White (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1998). The book is put out by Focus on the Family, and the Kostaroffs recommend it highly. They also mentioned a book that they used when the children were a little younger: *The One-Year Book of Devotions for Kids*, also published by

Tyndale House (1993; \$10). Aimed at children between the ages of eight and fourteen, the daily stories, each illustrating a scripture passage, were taken from a devotional magazine published by the Children's Bible Hour. I came away from the Kostaroffs both inspired and helped as a parent. Hope you have been, too.

#### Eating crow over Veggie Tales

On another matter: my oldest daughter tells me that I showed my age when I panned the Veggie Tale videos! She informs me that all the Christians that she knows in their 30's and on down in age love to watch the Veggie Tales and that students at the near-by Christian college gather to view them on Friday nights. Hmm!! Guess that's the difference between those of us who grew up on television and those of us who didn't.

Share your parenting concerns, suggestions, and ideas. Write to Elton and me at 9 Adams Lane, Dearborn, Michigan 48120, or e-mail us at "Ehiggs@umich.edu".

*Laquita and Elton Higgs, both graduates of Abilene Christian University, have generously offered time, talent, and spiritual direction to the Integrity ministry for more than 17 years. Both are occupied as professors at the University of Michigan, and as parents to four-year-old Rachel.*

*Says Laquita, "Alexander Pope, the 18th century English poet, said, 'Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.' Accordingly, we call this regular feature of parenting advice 'Bending the Twig.' All of us as Christian parents should be committed to a great deal of unashamed 'twig bending' for the Lord, and we need each other's help to do it."*

**Do you know someone who might be interested in receiving Integrity? Please let interested friends know they can receive their own subscription simply by requesting one via mail or e-mail. See the inside front cover for details.**



## The song and dance king

Elmer Prout

The queen expected the king to enter town in correct kingly style. A royal stride. A restrained nod. A regally lifted hand. Modestly toned speech. Every step and gesture properly controlled. It was the way things were done.

That was what Queen Michal expected. But when she looked out the window the queen saw a sight quite different from her expectations. There was the king—her husband—"leaping and dancing" in full view of every one in Jerusalem. (see II Samuel 6:12-21) The moment she saw that dance Michal despised King David and wrote him off as a "vulgar fellow."

By the rules of Israelite etiquette the queen had it right. But King David had something else in mind. He "danced before the Lord with all his might." In reply to the queen's criticism David said, "It was before the Lord . . . I will celebrate before the Lord."

I thought of that incident the other day while reading Psalm 145:1-7. The verbs of worship and adoration dance without restraint across the page—exalt, praise, extol, commend, tell, proclaim, celebrate, sing. (see Psalm 145 NIV) How long after the Jerusalem parade did David write this

psalm? Could it have been the very same day? Did the words flash into his mind as he pranced with glee at the return of the ark of the covenant?

Regardless of when they were written, David's words surge and splash like a mountain stream fed by the melting snow of summer. The thaw is in full force. There is no stopping the cataract.

No mumbling monotone. No embarrassed hesitation. None of the "I wonder what people might say if . . . ?" The flood tide broke over all restraints. "They shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant acts of deliverance." (Psalm 145:7, Claus Westermann translation).

David the Song and Dance King. What are we to do with this fellow? We could join the queen—too vulgar for us. We could temper the impact with dogmatic fine print: "Well, after all, David was an Old Testament person . . ." Or we could admit that we need a song and dance king: someone to lead us past our timid propriety. Someone more concerned to celebrate the Lord than to conform to custom.

There they stand: David and Michal. It's time for us to decide: frown and complain with Michal or sing and dance to the Lord with David . . .

*Elmer Prout has been a missionary and minister in Restoration Movement churches for many years. He currently ministers to the church in Grafton, California.*



## Rethinking a key issue

Ken Hensley

I'm afraid I'm not the world's best dancer. I've been given a life's sentence in a body which will never master line dancing or anything far more adventurous. And it's probably best that way, or at least safer.

Whenever I read David's final psalm (150) I often wonder if he felt sympathy for those with the commitment but not the coordination. His admonition to praise God with dancing surely left out those who could never put their best foot forward. Perhaps David was simply exercising poetic license in illustrating his point.

For some of us, we wish the book of Psalms ended with only 149 chapters. Chapter 150 seems out of control and too well orchestrated, both figuratively and literally. Why couldn't he have stopped after only two verses, two innocent verses? Why did he have to list all the players in the band: the trumpet, harp and lyre, tambourine, strings and flute, and those loud cymbals?

Yet can you imagine David without some form of music? For those of us within a cappella churches we might be tempted to become revisionists for the sake of re-creating David in our image. Our integrity won't allow us to do such a thing so we do the next best thing—explain it away. While running the risk of being accused of

beating a dead horse, it may be time that we re-examine the issue of music in worship.

### The importance of the music issue

There are several good reasons for re-opening the issue of music in worship. First and foremost in the discussion should be the concern to have faithfully and carefully examined the biblical evidence. Yet this may be where the process breaks down, for there is undoubtedly much debate taking place over how to "faithfully and carefully" interpret the Bible. Are all old assumptions true? Are all new approaches without respect for proper authority? We'll look at a few of the hermeneutical questions in a moment.

In addition to the exegetical exercises, there is another reason we need to re-open this issue: evangelism. While staying true to sound exegetical principles, we must also bring an evangelistic hermeneutic with us when we look at this theme. In actuality, this evangelistic hermeneutic springs from and is supported by sound exegesis. But a little later in the article we articulate why this is also an evangelistic issue.

### Hermeneutical questions

Our Restoration heritage has always strived to be a people of the Book. That desire has led us to

great discoveries of biblical truth. It has also led to serious disagreements about how to arrive at biblical truth. Ideally, we all could read a passage and arrive at a common conclusion, but we know that is not always the case. In some instances, the baggage we bring with us (educational, denominational, cultural) gets in our way as we journey. Some would rather not admit bringing any baggage with them—and that may be the heaviest and costliest baggage of all.

There are several pertinent questions when it comes to correctly interpreting the idea of music in worship. Traditionally, we have used a mixture of several principles to arrive at our conclusion. Within the larger discussion of interpretation we have used direct command, example, and necessary inference. Specifically, as it relates to music, we have relied heavily on two concepts: Silence of the Scriptures and the Law of Exclusion. Let's look further at these.

### Some would rather not admit bringing any baggage with them—and that may be the heaviest and costliest baggage of all.

#### ›Direct Command

The idea here is pretty simple, on the surface. Whenever God or one of his inspired authors says to do something (imperative in the Greek) we must do it. "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12) is not an option or a suggestion, but a command. But not all direct commands are followed with the same passion. "Greet one another with a holy kiss"

(Romans 16:16) may seem reasonable to some, but for the most part, a handshake has been allowed to substitute.

Both John 15:12 and Romans 16:16 are direct commands given through inspiration, so why are both not followed? Here is where direct commands lose their simplicity. Cultural issues have long been used to modify direct commands while seeking to maintain universal principles. It is argued, and rightly so, that Paul is concerned with Christian hospitality more than he is the method of greeting. But how did we arrive at that conclusion? We made a judgment call that Paul did not view the method of greeting with a holy kiss as essential to the universal principle of hospitality. Nonetheless, it remains a direct command we chose to modify.

What are the direct commands in relation to music in worship? From Ephesians 5:19-20 we find four:

1. We are to speak to one another.
  2. We are to sing.
  3. We are to make music in our hearts to the Lord.
  4. We should do so with thanksgiving.
- Colossians 3:16 simply includes the command to sing. These are the direct commands given as they relate to the issue at hand.

Without using any of the other principles of interpretation, what can we learn from the direct commands? God wants us to sing to him and for one another. He is also concerned with the heart motive and that we do it with thanksgiving. Singing is not a dull routine but a stirring, emotional expression to God. Again, on the sur-

face, using examples to learn how to worship appears to be simple. All one should have to do is see how the earliest Christians did it and follow suit. Only one problem appears—there is no detailed worship account recorded in the New Testament. All that we have are bits and pieces of instructions, warnings, and reminders but no start-to-finish account of a sample worship service. No order of worship, or liturgy, appears anywhere in New Testament Scripture.

We have the two references in Ephesians and Colossians but they do not necessarily constitute an example, only a command. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 14:26 that some who come to worship bring with them a hymn but he does not go into greater detail about the nature of that hymn. The truest case of an example comes from the upper room, Matthew 26:30, where Jesus and his disciples sing a hymn before leaving.

Some have suggested that in lieu of a New Testament example, one should turn to early church history. While this approach is good for ascertaining information it is not the most stable ground on which to base one's beliefs. The obvious favorite is inspired Scripture, not uninspired church fathers. So, the use of examples alone is not sufficient to derive a biblical position.

### **Necessary inference**

The best way to understand necessary inference is to think of inferences as deductions or conclusions reached by looking at the evidence and making a decision. This often works in conjunction with either direct commands or examples, and sometimes, both. An

example of necessary inference is used by those who believe in using only one communion cup. They reason that Jesus "took of the cup" and passed it around (Matthew 26:27). Jesus didn't take many cups or even several cups—just one cup. From his example we can infer that we are to only use one cup.

Should this inference be binding? It appears logical and even has the additional support of divine example. People have used necessary inference to support baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29) and infant baptism (Acts 16:33) among others. What are the limits of necessary inference? What defines necessary? Who defines necessary?

Inferences rely on the human ability to reason and come to conclusions. What is deemed necessary is often in the eye of the beholder, who looks at issues through his own set of priorities, objectives, and prejudices. I may look at Acts 2:42-47 and infer that today's Christians need to sell their possessions and meet together daily. Someone else may infer from the same passage that we need to live simple lifestyles but do not have to sell all we have and as long as we meet together often—that is enough. Which is right and which is wrong? Why?

### **Campbell on necessary inference**

Thomas Campbell refused to make necessary inferences binding as a rule or practice. Listen to a section of his *Declaration and Address*:

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... Therefore, no deductions can be made in terms of communion, but do properly belong to the progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.

### **Inferences from the singing passages**

Without using the other elements of interpretations, what can we infer from the singing passages of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3? Obvious (at least to me) is God's concern for our ability to verbalize our praise to him in the form of a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song. We can infer that this pleases God since we are told to do it by him. What is inferred about our attitude during singing? Thankfulness is to spring from the heart. What is inferred about the method? Without using the law of exclusion we can infer only that God desires us to sing and cannot comment on whether or not that is to be with accompaniment.

Inferences and deductions are not necessarily the safest ground to stand on hermeneutically. Indeed, they rely on human wisdom and reasoning and, therefore, cannot be placed on

an equal pedestal with God's own voice.

### **Silence of the Scripture**

Perhaps no area of interpretation has produced more division than the issue of what silence does or does not mean. An early motto of the Restoration Movement was "Speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent." Silence is what God did not say as opposed to what he did say. The main difficulty lies in whether to view silence as permissive or as prohibitive.

In reality, we view silence as both. We use silence in a permissive manner to justify buildings, Christian colleges, annotated music, and Sunday schools. God's commands to train up a child and for the older to mentor the younger are not accompanied with a commentary on how to do so. In this case we take liberty with the silence and develop a method. The mechanics of how to take up the collection fall under a permissive or expedient view of silence.

### **Prohibitive silence**

In Churches of Christ we also use silence in a prohibitive manner. This is the point at which we apply another principle known as the Law of Exclusion. The Law of Exclusion states that whatever God mentions automatically excludes everything else which fits within the given category. The classic example used most often is that of Noah building the ark. God told him to use gopher wood and therefore did not have to specify not to use oak, cherry, etc.

This principle has varied degrees of validity. In effect, it elevates to a binding status not only what God said but also what he *didn't* say. Therefore, the burden of ascertaining what is or is not authoritative rests more on the shoulder of the interpreter than it does God. It is up to us to determine exactly all that falls within a given category which must be excluded on the basis of what was included. To not be thorough or complete in one's listing and search is to endanger a proper understanding of God's will. Of course, differences arise over what is to be included and what is to be left out.

While silence has been used to justify church buildings, Christian schools, hymnals, and Sunday schools, it has also been used to condemn those very things. From the same place where support is found for these—in silence—prohibition is found as well. It has been in determining when silence is permissive or prohibitive that has caused us the most trouble.

### **Permissive or prohibitive?**

How are we to deal with silence? Should it always be permissive or not? Should we strive for an across the board, never failing treatment of silence? We haven't. Many would be equally upset at the things silence

would allow with a completely permissive view as they would be at the things a prohibitive view would disallow.

What does God *not* say about singing in the church? He does not say anything about who is to lead or how many are to lead. He is silent about whether it is to be in unison or in parts. There is nothing mentioned about the use of special groups, solo's, or complete congregational singing. Nor is musical accompaniment mentioned.

### **Hermeneutical observations**

In matters of faith I would rather rest my assurance on things which are concrete—principles and teachings which are immovable and immutable. Direct commands, even with cultural limitations and interpretations, are to be held as the voice of God in matters of faith and beliefs. Where God speaks, let us listen.

However, much of our argument against instrumental music comes not from direct commands but from necessary inference and a prohibitive view of silence. To say that God tells us to sing is fine but to end up with the conclusion that it means to only sing, one must then invoke the Law of Exclusion and inferences. Since this falls within the realm of human opinion and arbitrary decision-making, it should not be binding. If we do allow the use of the Law of Exclusion then let's apply it consistently in all matters of faith and practice.

I believe reality shows us that our predominant hermeneutic within Churches of Christ has been what I call "anti-denominationalism." In

other words, if something is in any way associated with a denomination, we should avoid it. Often this provides the starting point and the scriptural arguments are TBA—to be announced at a later date. We have so often prided ourselves on not being like the denominations that we tended to interpret their interpretations of scripture and not just scripture itself.

### ***Psalmos* and *psallo***

Also to be considered in any hermeneutical analysis are the words involved. Two are prominent: *psalmos* and *psallo*. The first, *psalmos*, is the word for psalm, a type of song. W.E. Vine says of *psalmos*: "a striking or twitching with the fingers (on musical strings)"; then, "a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm." He goes on to note that it is used in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Under the heading of "Hymn," Vine writes of *psalmos*: "the *psalmos* denoted that which had a musical accompaniment."

Concerning *psallo*, translated melody, Vine writes: "to twitch, twang," then, "to play a stringed instrument with the fingers," and hence, in the Sept., "to sing with a harp, sing psalms," denotes in the New Testament, "to sing a hymn, sing praise." Often it is heard that the place where the melody making is to occur is within the heart and not on any instrument. This assumes that one cannot make melody in their heart while at the same playing or listening to musical accompaniment.

### **➤Towards an evangelistic hermeneutic**

The issue of music in the church is fast becoming an evangelistic issue. It needs to be re-examined because of the way in which it has increasingly saturated our culture and for its ability to communicate and impact. The scriptural background for this can be seen in the ministry of Paul.

### **➤Paul's Perspective**

Paul lived his life out of a sense of mission which arose from his meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. This life-changing encounter motivated Paul to proclaim the gospel often at great personal expense. His basic motif was to "win as many as possible" (1 Cor 9:19). For Paul this demanded a great degree of personal flexibility, even to the point where he could say "we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:12).

### **Paul's Methodology**

Though he was trained as a Jew, a Hebrew of Hebrews, Paul did not approach every evangelistic situation as a Jew. While in Athens in Acts 17 Paul utilizes two distinct approaches in presenting Christ, one Jewish and one pagan. The heart of both messages is the same, but the methodology differs. Paul elaborates on this issue in 1 Corinthians 9 when he writes, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (9:19). Paul was willing to "become all things to all people" for the express purpose that "I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Obviously

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**However, much of our argument against instrumental music comes not from direct commands but from necessary inference and a prohibitive view of silence.**

this approach would not sit well with some of his contemporaries but Paul did not relent. Why?

### Paul's Motivation

"I do all of this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor 9:23). Paul brought an evangelistic hermeneutic to his ministry because his motivation was the expansion of the kingdom. Or, as he writes in his second letter to this church, "We make it our goal to please him" (2 Cor 5:9).

### Today's situation

Like no other time before us we live in a world that is inundated with music. It is used to sell products, to calm anxieties on elevators, to instruct children. It fueled an entire generation in the '60s. Many of those raised in that time were shaped more by Bob Dylan and the Beatles than they were by God, country, or mom and dad. Some folks equip their cars with stereos worth more than the car itself.

We are a society which communicates more and more through music. Then candidate Bill Clinton chose a Fleetwood Mac song as his

## ...yet when the unchurched come to our worship services, they are painfully aware of our lack of music.

campaign's theme. Ross Perot danced to Patsy Cline. The sounds of the "Star Spangled Banner" bring crowds to their feet and hands across hearts. Dramatic scenes in movies are heightened by appropriately timed music which stirs the emo-

tions.

And yet when the unchurched come to our services they are painfully aware of our lack of accompaniment. Those who do take the time to question the issue are often disappointed with the inconsistencies and tend to disregard more weighty issues. To make matters worse, many of our own people are embarrassed by our position on the issue and are afraid to even invite an unchurched person to our services.

### Why music matters

If we are to connect with any generation born since 1950 we will have to re-evaluate our position on instrumental music. Not only does it stand on shaky theological grounds but it has become a hindrance to reaching out with the gospel in familiar, relevant forms. One need not assume that an evangelistic hermeneutic opens the door to the gospel being enslaved by culture. There is a danger in compromising the message along with the method. However, within our heritage there has been ample time allotted to fine-tuning the message; what is needed is a revamping of our methods.

If the lack of musical accompaniment is to be a hinderance (and an unnecessary one at that) it should be re-evaluated in light of our mission as a church: "to seek and save the lost." Baby Boomers and Busters struggle to connect with songs which speak of life on the farm, and then drag along without a good beat behind it.

If our worship is the number one place where most unchurched

is), our worship should in some way reflect and appeal to them. Already I hear some objecting about catering to "itchy ears." It's not a matter of compromise but of *effectively* reaching a lost world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Given hermeneutical, evangelistic and cultural grounds the issue of music in worship should be open to further study, and may we bring to the table a love for truth and a zeal for our mission.

*Ken Hensley, a frequent contributor, ministers to the Allied Gardens Church of Christ in San Diego, California.*



## UNITY SIGHTINGS

### Restoration Forum XVI

*R. Vernon Boyd*

The Woodmont Hills church in Nashville, TN hosted this year's gathering of saints from both sides of the keyboard-independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ and the a cappella Churches of Christ. The fifteen years of these gatherings (in the first year, two meetings were held) have produced a solid core of individuals who sincerely want to re-establish what fellowship there can be within the Restoration Movement between these two groups.

This year's session attracted less than 200 persons, coming from about 23 states. Neither side is interested in "converting" the other, nor is anyone asked to surrender precious understandings as to what the Scriptures mean, including beliefs regarding instrumental music, a key factor symptomatic of the original division.

Outstanding speakers from each side were brought in to speak on indi-

vidual topics or to address the same issue from two different perspectives. Note that the third major division of the Restoration Movement, the Disciples of Christ, is little represented in the Restoration Forums since its theology has generally distanced them from the common understandings which the two groups here represent on most Biblical issues.

The exception to this was the presence of Lyndsay and Lorraine Jacobs who are General Secretaries of the World Convention of Churches of Christ, an organization which seeks to unite all segments of the Restoration Movement. Natives of New Zealand, their office is currently in Nashville and their church membership is with Woodmont Hills congregation. The efforts are focused evenly to all three divisions encouraging attendance at the World Convention of the Churches of Christ

scheduled for Brisbane, Australia August 26 in the year 2000. Lyndsay led a prayer for the group and urged not only the purpose of the Restoration Forum, but for a broader recognition of the many churches in 150 countries around the world which have their origin in the Restoration Movement.

All of the speeches in this Forum dealt with building bridges of trust and cooperation between the two groups present. Practical suggestions were given as to how churches and individuals might work together without compromising convictions. Speakers from the a cappella churches were: Mike Root, Richard Goode, Calvin Warpula, Mike Armour and Rubel Shelly. Speakers from the independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ were: James North, Mark Moore, David Wead and Tom Burgess.

A special session was presented by Dr. Richard Tristano who, as a researcher for the Glenmary order of the Catholic Church while living in Atlanta, GA, was asked to write a book on the Restoration Movement for priests who were attempting to minister in southern states in the United States. Although the book he wrote is now over 10 years old, he gave an outsider's (Catholic) impression of the Movement about which he was much impressed. There was a question and answer session for this and other presentations.

A new feature which the planners added to the usual Forum format called for a recognition of believers

outside of the Restoration Movement. This was done by inviting two individuals to speak at the morning devotionals. L. H. Hardwick, Jr. grew up in the United Pentecostal Church and has preached 47 years. He is now senior pastor of the 6,000 member Christ Church in Nashville. In 1986 he broke away from his spiritual roots to lead the church as an independent, non-denominational body. Speakers gave brief sketches of their spiritual pilgrimages, stressing their attempts to answer the call of the Lord to their lives.

Time was given on Monday afternoon for a tour of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. This organization has an impressive collection of information and artifacts from the three major branches of the Restoration Movement, although the greatest emphasis in the artwork and public displays favors the Disciples of Christ, the major financial contributor to this institution; however, its governing board represents all three divisions of the Restoration Movement. It is from this Historical Society that an encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement is presently in the works.

All the speaking sessions were taped and may be obtained through Gaylor MultiMedia, Inc., 804 Musket Trail, Nashville, TN 37217 or call 1-888-310-3100. Through the Twickenham Church of Christ, Huntsville, AL. All sessions were live on the internet at [twickenham.org](http://twickenham.org). Restoration Forum XVII will be in Calgary, Saskatchewan, Oct. 15-17, 1999.

*Vernon Boyd ministers to the Oakland Church of Christ in Southfield, Michigan.*



## HOT TOPIC RESPONSES



We occasionally print a question about a subject of current interest in the Stone-Campbell movement churches, or in Christendom at large. The "Hot Topic" question is designed to generate dialogue from those holding pertinent opinions on any facet of the subject. We will print responses to the previous issue's "Hot Topic" in this space.

### *From Scott Wiley, Western Michigan University:*

Overall I thought the thrust of the non-creedal creed theme missed a golden opportunity, and perhaps even the point. As I read through the articles I kept thinking, "Ah, but on the other hand . . ."

Rather than viewing things from 180 degrees, it may have been more effective, persuasive and have a greater long term impact to view things from 90 degrees. From childhood I have known that the RM has championed a creed, that being, "No creed, but Christ." It has also been evident that folks latched onto the first half of the creed and lost sight of the second. I believe that emphasizing the second half of our creed is the key to getting back on track as a unity movement and off the purity movement side track. Rather than a 180 degree rejection and jettisoning the whole idea, we ought to take a 90 degree turn and refocus on the forgot-

Last issue's "Hot Topic" was:

### **Should congregations make written statements of faith and practice?**

Here is a sample of the responses we received:

ten half. Instead of viewing our creed as "no creed..." we view our creed as "... but Christ".

In his book *Free In Christ*, Cecil Hook (pg 4-8) lists 100 items upon which folks in the Churches of Christ disagree. I am unaware of the formula for determining how many combinations may be made from a set of numbers, but I am sure that the total number of combinations possible in a set of 100 is astounding. My experience is that, if folks outside the churches of Christ know anything at all about us, they usually have it wrong. From an outsider's perspective we are viewed as having a degree of homogeneity in doctrine that, in truth, is but a dream.

It seems to me that our Restoration Movement (RM) forebears were reticent about placing in print a creed that defined for everyone what must be believed. Though roughly equivalent, in the present issue of *Integrity* the creeds (or foundations

for one) proffered do differ, and this is the problem the old timers sought to avoid. The individual items in the creeds, then existant, were not objectionable; it was their existance *as* creeds, and the implications and practical problems to which the RM objected.

Once we start to itemize, where do we stop? Which combination of items suggested by Cecil Hook's list ought to be added and which left off? I even have brothers in the churches of Christ whom I love and worship with, who have a very difficult time accepting the triune nature of God. How basic, simple, essential and humble—is basic, simple, essential and humble enough?

However, by shifting 90 degrees and emphasizing not the negative, "No creed . . .", but rather emphasizing the positive, ". . . but Christ" we have a Christocentric creed that potentially eliminates so much of our trouble, and creates greater opportunities for unity.

**. . .by emphasizing the positive half of our creed, which encourages the resumption of the unity movement, we can envision again the best that the RM sought to bring to life.**

Rather than wrangling over a new creed, and creating frustration for so many over the perception of leaving the old paths, we can renew and refresh our commitment to the restoration by re-articulating what we have

always (generally speaking) held to be true. The creed of "no creeds, *but Christ.*"

This creed is not new or strange to the ears of the heirs of the RM, it honors God and scripture, and is consistent with what has already been written of positively in the churches of Christ. Nelson M. Smith, for example, has a fine book emphasizing a Christocentric view, called *For Me To Live Is Christ* (Western Christian Foundation, Inc, 1977) in which few could find any fault.

Or, hearkening back yet another generation to the 40's and Leroy Brownlow's *Why I Am A Member of the church of Christ*, we find several chapters emphasizing Christ, and if read through a christocentric lens, rather than a non-creedal lens, most of the rest of the book is also seen as pointing to, and honoring, Christ as central to our faith.

We have a tendency to find what we look for, emphasizing the negative half of our creed, combined with a purity movement, we find problematic results at best. But, by emphasizing the positive half of our creed, which encourages the resumption of the unity movement, we can envision again the best that the RM sought to bring to life.

Rather than disparaging and giving up our creed, I suggest we breath new life into our creed by putting a heavy accent on the latter part of "no creed, *but Christ.*"

I look forward to future issues of *Integrity*.



Our "Hot Topic" for next issue is:

**How should congregations deal with "aggressive stumblers"—those "weak" members who stubbornly and irrationally refuse even positive change?**

Please send us your thoughts—short or long, pro or con. We want to hear from you!

Send them to Kelly Sprague, who can be reached at:

**sksprague@juno.com, or integrit@mich.com**

or: Kelly Sprague, 5393 Crooks Road, Suite 44, Troy, MI 48098



## READERS' RESPONSE

### **Regarding creeds and Integrity Rochester, MN**

I really appreciated the latest edition of *Integrity*! The articles on "creeds" were right on the money, and desperately needed! I have often said it would be better to have *written* creeds than the *unwritten* ones we have in the Church of Christ. There are some "lines" out there, and if crossed will cause our form of excommunication! You just can't always see the lines, but they're there. So it's kind of like boxing shadows. I have a friend who is teaching in one of "our" colleges, who has been accused of not being "doctrinally pure," because he is not insistent enough that the Church of Christ is the only church. He is teaching the Bible only, but that doesn't seem to be good enough. Your latest issue will get a lot of us thinking. Thanks!  
*Donald Lloyd*

### **Regarding creeds via e-mail** Editors

I am quite pleased with the fall issue of *Integrity*! For twenty years as a subscriber I have been strengthened in the faith both by struggling with the ideas of writers whose thinking was bolder than mine (some in the last issue, for instance), and rejoicing in the wonderfully clear statement of things I have already more or less understood but been unable to say so well.

Reed Benedict's article on our Lord's Supper Creeds is a fine one, but in this case I think he isn't bold enough! My own Lord's Supper prayers and comments (few of our people know what a homily is) have for several years incorporated the  
(continued on the back cover)



We know you like to read as much as we do, and, since you read *Integrity*, you probably especially enjoy reading about issues concerning Christianity. Accordingly, we'd like to use this space to enrich your reading list. (Although, if it's like ours, your stack of "must-reads" is so high that it threatens to topple over, unread. And if you're like us, even this looming stack isn't enough: there's always more that we "must" read.)

**A note from  
*World Christian***

Our copy of *Integrity* arrived this morning's mail, and we enjoyed reading through it as usual. From cover to cover it is intentionally thought-provoking, challenging us all to look at our own biases and attitudes, and together to work harder at building bridges and not barriers to being God's community.

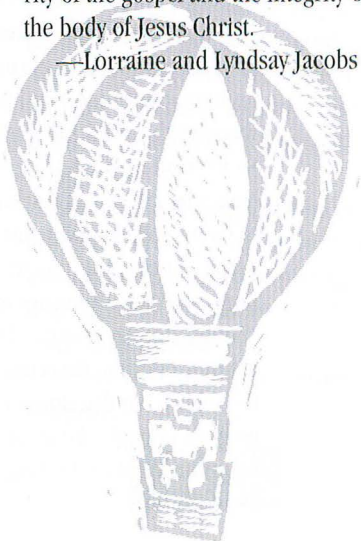
*World Christian* is a global 'bridging' publication available quarterly in the 161 countries where there are churches from our heritage. It shares reflection and information about unity action amongst our churches in different areas around the world, plus historical and contemporary information about different countries where we have churches. It also contains information about being involved in the next quadrennial gathering of people from our church family.

People who are interested in a sample copy should contact Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs at:

World Christian  
World Convention of Churches of Christ  
1101 19th Avenue South  
Nashville TN 37212-2196  
USA  
email: worldconv@aol.com  
>website: <http://users.aol.com/worldconv/>

May God's grace, love, joy and peace surround, fill and flow from each of us as we witness to the integrity of the gospel and the integrity of the body of Jesus Christ.

—Lorraine and Lyndsay Jacobs



*Coming up in Integrity*

If you would like to submit materials for any of these upcoming issues, please do so! You will find submission guidelines on the inside front cover.

*Summer 1999*

**Ministering to our ministers**

*Fall 1999*

**Death and dying from a Christian perspective**

Start typing!  
We're looking forward  
to hearing from you.

