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# RESTORATION REVIEW



A KILLER IS LOOSE IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST!

*"The letter of the law leads to the death of the soul."  
(1 Cor. 3:6)*

See Article on Page 127

*Also In This Issue:*

Who Is A Real Christian?

"Will Only Members of the Church of Christ Be Saved?"

# RESTORATION REVIEW



Cynical? Perhaps, but Solomon said, "To every thing there is a season . . . a time to laugh; a time to mourn . . ." The prevailing situation does not seem to call for laughter. —FORUM Editor

### FAITH AND OPINION?

To the Editor:

Your statement that you cannot see that opinions have any bearing on brotherhood, seems to indicate that you recognize a distinction between matters of opinion and matters of faith. If so, I wonder whether you have any rules for determining the difference. Few phenomena have seemed more obvious to me than that what one regards as an *opinion* is often a matter of *faith* to another. Would you say, for instance, that it is a matter of *faith* that *baptisma* in connection with a Christian's conversion refers to an *immersion*, but a matter of *opinion* that at the end, or toward the end, of this age the kingdom of heaven — the future reign of Jesus over the inhabited earth — will be *at hand*? It has impressed me that the "Campbellite slogan" that calls for unity in matters of faith and liberty in matters of opinion has in almost every case been applied in reverse, i.e. when a group is united on something they demand that it be regarded as "faith," but when they already tolerate certain differences, they label them as "opinions." The slogan has never been of any practical benefit, because there is no court of appeal to distinguish between "faith and opinion" among us except one's own interpretation of Scriptures, and these interpretations are clear to one who sees it and not clear to one who does not see it, and the only way to bridge the gap between not seeing it and seeing it is by patiently presenting one's insight to another's vision, hoping that he will have the purity of heart that makes him willing to look — and this can often best be achieved by showing one's self willing to look at what the other fellow desires to explain. — Bill

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RESTORATION REVIEW, 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, Texas



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Who Is A Real Christian?

"Will Only Members of the Church of Christ Be Saved?"

It was a sober moment when my eyes fell upon the following words, written by Winfred Garrison in *The College of the Bible Quarterly*:

It is not so easy to be equally certain that we are actually and essentially Christian. We cannot take it for granted quite as casually as we do our basic humanity. It requires some self-examination. Since I have already discounted the possibility of defining essential Christianity, I am not going to be lured into stating specific tests by which one can tell whether or not one has it. "Let each man examine himself."

It is true that there are various texts that seem pertinent to this inquiry. They give helpful hints, but probably none of them was designed to be the complete and final answer to the question. They combine to give me the impression that the crucial issues are: What do you love? What is the object of your most earnest concern? What do you most deeply desire?

Who is a *real* Christian? As I read these words from Prof. Garrison I was moved to a moment of self-scrutiny: *Am I truly Christian?* I recalled the book by C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in which he attempted to state the essence of Christianity apart from theology and creedalism. One statement in that book that I recall underscoring is: "When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less." Lewis may help to answer Garrison's question, for surely a Christian, among other things, is one who realizes his own sinfulness. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of

God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." (Rom. 7:25)

The value of the point raised by Garrison is that it helps to re-complexify a question that we have answered too simply. It is both easy and proper for us to refer to the many scriptures on faith, repentance and baptism in identifying the Christian. Certainly there is a vital connection between believing in the Christ and being baptized into Him and becoming a Christian. But does this *really* tell us who is a Christian?

There are certain external signs to which we point, including baptism and the Lord's Supper, which we believe to be relevant to the question of who is a Christian, and yet we realize that Christianity is more a matter of the heart than it is externals. We all agree that one is hardly a Christian just because he has been baptized. He might take the Lord's Supper and otherwise live a life that is full of church activity and yet not be a real Christian.

Is this partly a semantic problem? You will notice that I am using terms like "*real* Christian" as distinct from "Christian." Is it correct to say that *all* those who profess Christianity are Christians, though many of them, maybe even most of them, are *bad* Christians or *lukewarm* Christians? This would make our question "Who is a real Christian" different from the question "Who is a Christian?" For instance, it seems more proper to refer to a worldly church member as a "bad Christian" than as a "non-Christian."

This is to say, in contradiction to Garrison, that there are "specific tests" in determining who is a Christian. Take Alexander Campbell's definition of a Christian:

But who is a Christian? I answer, Everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will.

Surely one must believe in the Christ and make some profession to follow His teaching if he is to be called a Christian. If we accept Moslems, Buddhists, and the lovely people of the world as Christians because of their benevolence, then the term "Christian" loses its meaning. It would be like what happened to the word *gentleman*, which originally referred to one who had a coat of arms and landed property. Then it was more generally applied to any man who showed the qualities of the genteel class, whether he was or not. And now the word is almost meaningless, suggesting little more than a *man*.

You will notice that Garrison says "actually and essentially Christian," which must mean more than a nominal Christian. This is the "real Christian" that we are asking about in this article.

The questions set forth by Garrison are very much to the point, and I should like to comment on each of the three.

*What do you love?*

Garrison is right; this question does call for self-examination. We can be most unlike Christ by the things we love. The Bible speaks of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). It warns us against the love of money, pointing out that "it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the

faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." (1 Tim. 6:10) It also tells us: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

These are the rivals against God for our heart: pleasure, money, the world. These stand for all the false values of life that lead us from God. The Christian is constantly tempted to compromise with the world, to yield spiritual values for worldly pleasure. But there can be no compromise; neither can there be neutrality. A man either loves the world or he loves God. He cannot serve two masters. If he truly loves God, he will be different from the world. It is here that each of us needs to search his heart with the question as to whether he is attracted to worldly standards of success.

"The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7) *How difficult it is to be different!* The person who loves God rather than the world will be different. Worldly ambition is the bridgehead for sin. "Because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12)

Love is probably more a thing of the will than of the emotions. The love we are to have for God, which is rather difficult to cultivate in terms of *feeling*, is a matter of willing God's way for our lives. To pray — and to mean it! — "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is to love God. To the one who says he has trouble loving God (that is, *feeling* the right way about Him), it is good advice to tell him to act as if he did love God. How will one behave in this world who truly loves God? Act that way!

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That love is a matter of *willing* and *acting* more than some emotional response is evident from a number of scriptures: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10); "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8); "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:17); "Love is patient and kind . . . Love does not insist on its own way" (1 Cor. 13); "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

What do I love? If love is the measure of my Christianity, then I must be cautious in making my claims. We must remember, however, that love is not our own work, but is rather the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). As I yield my life to Him who gave Himself for me, He will give to me the Spirit of God, and through this "renewing of the Holy Spirit" I will love God with my whole personality, which Jesus says is the greatest commandment of all (Mk. 12:30).

*What is the object of your most earnest concern?*

This question implies that the Christian is one who cares. Indifference to the injustices of this world is so unlike Christ. There is surely a call for "the fellowship of the concerned ones." Ours is a terribly troubled world, and amidst it all the Christian is the one who should care most of all. Most of us hardly get outside the small circle of our own selfish lives.

*Jesus wept.* These tender words

should motivate us to weep for a world so full of conflict. Compassion and forbearance are listed among the virtues that are most like Christ (Col. 3:12-13). "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 5:31). Some poet has said, "Lord, forgive us for looking at the world with a dry eye." The Christian not only feels for the world, but he is a fellow worker with God in alleviating human misery.

No modern Christian has been more concerned for social justice than Archbishop William Temple. He sees the Christian called by God to make a reasoned defense of the faith and to conform the social order more to the will of God. Temple says it is a betrayal of the gospel for the Christian to be indifferent to building a better world. "Self-contentment is the death of vital religion; self-complacency and perdition are inseparable if not indistinguishable," he once wrote. He believed that the child of God can work creatively with his Lord in the enhancement of society.

What concerns us most? Financial security? Retirement? the New York Yankees? a weekend at the beach? Automobiles? Houses? Or are we concerned most of all about the souls of men and women? the illiteracy in the world, the poverty, the hate? Broken hearts and broken homes, widows and orphans, the outcasts that nobody loves? How concerned are we for human decency?

The question of concern is surely related to the question of who is a real Christian. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).

*What do you most deeply desire?*

A number of philosophers and psychologists that I have read contend that man is by nature a creature of self-interest. Everything man does is motivated by his own selfish desires, however philanthropic the act may appear to be. A good case can be made for this point of view. Each of us is forced to concede, the more we scrutinize our innermost self, that so much of what we do is very selfish. Few of our deeds stem from perfectly pure motives. All this is the natural man, of whom Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 2:14: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." It is only by the Spirit of God that man is able to rise above the fleshly lusts and the materialistic desires of the unspiritual man.

The deepest desire of some men is sexual escapades; with others it is business success or high position. With others it is a proud victory over their competitors. With others it is property, education, wealth or fame. Some would think the grandest thing on earth for them would be to become the president or a king, or to head a great corporation. It is the desire for power over others that motivates so many of us.

These desires are not all necessarily wrong, of course. It depends on the emphasis given to them in our lives. But it helps us to get at that very pertinent question: *what will the Christian desire most deeply?*

"May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans! (Psa. 20:4). But what are our plans and

desires? Paul could write: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1). He explains in Eph. 2:3 that we become "children of wrath like the rest of mankind" whenever we "live in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind." The *desires of the mind* in this passage probably refers to our own will, our own designs and purposes instead of the will of God. It could refer to intellectual pride.

The Bible speaks of those "who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:12), and we may assume that the number with such a desire are few. And we are told to "earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31).

More than anything else the Christian desires God and desires to be conformed to the likeness of God through Christ.

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God." (Psa. 42:2).

"My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God." (Psa. 84:2)

"My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee." (Isa. 26:9)

"Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee." (Psa. 73:25)

"As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6)

Such passages give us some indication of the mind of a child of God. It is not amiss to say that the real Christian is this kind of person.—*the Editor*

A lengthy article with this title appeared recently in the *Gospel Guardian*, which might be called a Church of Christ publication of the far right wing. The article itself, however, is typical of the kind of argument with which most of us are so familiar, and which some of us have begun to question.

The author begins by observing that "The report has been widely circulated that members of the church of Christ think they are the only ones who are right, the only ones going to heaven, and that all others are bound for hell." You will notice that an orthodox Church of Christ member *never* uses the capital "C" for *church* as I have done in this sentence. I have already written on this rather strange notion (*Restoration Review*, Vol 5, No. 2) and will not repeat it here except to point out that what people *really* think is that members of the Church of Christ (with the capital "C") believe they are the only ones who are right, the only ones going to heaven, and that all others are bound for hell.

The idea that the general public has of the group (or groups) known as "Church of Christ" is that they claim to be the only true Christians, the only ones that are right, the one true church. The public is not saying that "the saved" and "the church of Christ" may not be equated. Surely everyone who professes Christianity would agree that those who are saved and those who compose the church are the same.

This is not the point. The point is that there is a modern religious group, commonly denominated as Church of Christ (a name incidentally that can be traced back no further than the 19th century, and which at the outset was not even used by the Restoration

pioneers) that supposes that it is the church of Jesus Christ, and that it alone is the true church. It is this that appears arrogant to so many people.

Our neighbors will not protest our saying that the Church of Christ embraces all the saved of earth and heaven, as the Bible plainly teaches; but they may justly object to the claim that *we* (our own congregations which are so distinguishable from the others) and *we only* are the Church of Christ. The *Guardian* article illustrates this fact clearly in a most interesting quotation from Adam Clarke, the noted Methodist scholar:

The Church of Christ was considered an enclosure; a field, or vineyard, well hedged or walled. Those who were not members of it were considered without; i.e., not under that especial protection and defense which the true followers of Christ had . . .

As to be a Christian was essential to the salvation of the soul, so to be in the Church of Christ was essential to being a Christian; therefore it was concluded that "there was no salvation out of the pale of the church."

We will have to excuse Adam Clarke for using the capital "C" — perhaps on the grounds that he didn't get to attend F r e e d - H a r d e m a n College. (When I was a student there under the renowned N. B. Hardeman I learned to keep my C's straight, if not my P's and Q's!)

The *Guardian* writer appreciates this remark by Clarke. He asks: "Was this a narrow-minded attitude for them to take?" He means was it narrow for the members of the New Testament churches to see themselves as the only Christians. Surely all Christendom will readily admit that it certainly was not narrow for the early church to suppose that they were the only Christians. Our

dear brother is missing the point, or, to be nearer correct, he is begging the question.

If Clarke should insinuate in such a quotation as the one above that his own Methodist Church is the Church of Christ, and that all the saved are in that church, I would think *him* to be narrow.

People feel the same way about us. If we spoke of the Church of Christ in a non-sectarian way, as did Adam Clarke, referring to *all* Christians, there would be no quarrel. But we equate our own movement, our own part of the universal church, with the Church of Christ of the New Testament. To this people take exception, and justly so, mainly because it just isn't true. I pointed out in my earlier editorial, referred to above, on "To 'C' or Not to 'C'" that the so-called *sectarian* writers speak of the "Church of Christ" in a non-sectarian way, while my *non-sectarian* brethren loyally write of "church of Christ" in a sectarian manner. The Clarke quotation is another instance.

The *Guardian* article goes on and on about the quality of the church founded by Christ: the church is God's eternal purpose, it is the body of Christ, the fulness of Christ, etc., with such attending questions as "Was membership in that church essential?"

This whole thing — "Will Only Members of the Church of Christ Be Saved?" — appearing in a Church of Christ journal as it does, is a gross case of what logicians call *equivocation*. This fallacy occurs when one uses the same term in two different senses, either explicitly or by implication, taking advantage of the most acceptable understanding of the term to one's own purpose.

Suppose, for instance, that the question read: "Will only members of the Body of Christ be saved?" Or let it read: "Will only members of the Church of God be saved?"

Our brother equivocates by employing a reference to a particular religious group ("The report has been widely circulated that members of the church of Christ think they are the only ones who are right, etc."), and then equating that group with the church of the New Testament, which is viewed as something entirely different by people generally. If our good brother wishes to see himself as others see him, he might imagine a Church of God minister writing just as he has done, only substituting Church of God for Church of Christ.

In such a case our brother would likely say to the Church of God man, "Yes, but the point is that there is a big difference between what you are calling the 'Church of God' and the Church of God of the New Testament." And that is precisely what I wish to say to my *Guardian* brother in this article.

Certainly one must belong to the church of Jesus Christ in order to be saved, once these terms are all understood properly. But one does not have to belong to what the *Gospel Guardian* usually refers to when it speaks of "the church of Christ" in order to be saved. There was no such church for 1800 years of Christianity!

That this "church of Christ" that the *Guardian* speaks of is part of the great Church of God on earth I doubt not, and I readily concede that within its context there are many of the great Christians of the world. I also believe that it has an important role to play in

mending the walls of a crumbled Zion. As part of the Restoration Movement it can have a significant mission within the church at large. This should be enough. When it claims that it *is* Christianity, the *only* Church of Christ there is, it largely negates the good it could otherwise do.

The idea that one must belong to the Church of Christ in order to be saved can be an embarrassing proposition, for someone just might ask, "Which Church of Christ is it that one must belong to?" The *Guardian* wing of our brotherhood is currently engaged in starting "loyal" churches in towns that have long had a *bona fide* Church of Christ. Is the implication that people must come out of the older church into the new one in order to be saved? Is the new congregation the true Church of Christ while the older one is not?

The embarrassment is intensified by the presence in the same city of upward of a dozen other kinds of Churches of Christ, all of which are anti-instrumental music and otherwise similar in doctrine and practice. Are *all* of these Churches of Christ? How much difference do disagreements over premillennialism, cups, classes, lodges, etc. count? When the *Guardian* writes of one's having to be in the Church of Christ to be saved, what Church of Christ is it talking about? The answer, to be sure, is *the New Testament church!* Yes, I know, but which of the several congregations *is* the New Testament church?

The *Guardian* article makes some effort to solve this problem, and really it is quite simple once one has all the answers. It is a matter of identifying the right church in the light of the description given of it in the New

Testament. This is risky business, for the congregations referred to in the Bible are by no means identical. Someone might ask, "Which congregation is it in the New Testament that you are using for a pattern?" It might be bad business to pattern it after Jerusalem with all its racial discrimination, or after Corinth with its carnality (and tongue-speaking of all things!), or after Ephesus which was told to repent under the threat of having its lampstand removed. After all of them together? But is there a composite pattern? And who is to be the infallible interpreter in such matters?

Our good brother says in the article from Lufkin that a church whose "organization is not described in the Bible" can scarcely be the true church. Can we be so sure about the organization of the primitive churches? Is there a monolithic structure? The most careful students of the New Testament assure us that there is no such precise, definitive organizational pattern. But granting for the moment that there is such a pattern, does the *Guardian* writer really believe that what he is calling "the church of Christ" is an exact reproduction of the organization of the primitive church?

Take, for instance, the salaried minister who serves as an officer in the congregation along with elders and deacons, which is a typical arrangement in the Churches of Christ. This hired functionary is actually the most important figure in the congregation since most of the services feature him. His role is so paramount that when he resigns another must be hired to take his place. Are the Church of Christ ministers, including our *Guardian* brother, going to tell us that this prac-

tice is patterned after the New Testament churches?

Another characteristic of the true, apostolic church, we are told, is its unity; therefore, the divisiveness apparent in "modern denominationalism" rules out all the denominations as the true church of Christ.

I am surprised on two counts that my brethren keep making this kind of argument, puerile and naive as it is. First, the primitive churches were anything but united, if that means they were alike in doctrine and practice, or even if it means that they got along well with each other. Second, we are the last people in the world that should issue warnings against "factions, divisions, parties," quoting Gal. 5:20-21 as the *Guardian* article does. If disunity, such as may be found among "the denominations," nullifies a people as being the true church, then all of us who claim any connection with the Churches of Christ are nullified on the first roll call, for we are the most divisive people in the whole Christian world.

This assumption that we are right and all the others are wrong is both cruel and stupid. I suggest we stop thinking in such terms here and now.

The position taken by *Restoration Review* along this line we believe to be sane and responsible, as well as true to the scriptures and to the history of the Restoration Movement. It may be summarized this way: the Church of Christ consists of all those who believe in the Christ as Lord and who lovingly obey him in all things according to their understanding, which assumes that they will be baptized believers who are spirit-filled. These saints of God are scattered throughout the

Christian world, belonging to all sorts of sects and denominations. They are Christians, not because of their affiliation with any particular sect, but because of their relationship to Christ Jesus. They are in the sects, but they are not sectarians. They would like to see all God's people together, but because of the confusion and division they know only to serve the Lord the best they can, despite the deficiencies.

This thesis further affirms that *no* religious communion of our day can claim to be the one true church. The true church is indeed a reality, as it has always been, consisting of the saints of God everywhere; but the church is divided and splintered so badly that much agonizing prayer and labor are necessary before it will achieve any semblance of oneness.

Our mission in the Restoration Movement is to restore to the church the unity that has always been the intention of God for his people, as it was the prayer of the Christ and the plea of the apostles. There is no indication that such unity has ever characterized the church to any substantial degree. Its history is one of strife and division, not excluding the primitive church itself.

The thesis of this journal, moreover, distinguishes the Restoration Movement from the church itself. We are a movement within the church, working for peace and brotherhood. This is different from saying we are the church, or that we have already restored the true church, and that it remains only for others to discover that fact and join our ranks. We must understand that the church is already among us, divided though it be, and that it is peace, love and fellowship

that is to be restored *to* the church. This must be our mission if we are to be useful to the Christian world.

What then are we to say about the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches and all the others? Is this to admit that they are Christian congregations or Churches of Christ? The answer is both *yes* and *no*. It is hardly proper to describe them as *unchristian!* They meet to worship the same Lord that we serve, and they rejoice in the victories for the Christ around the world, lending their support to those victories. They most certainly are *Christian*. They assuredly are not pagan or heathen or Moslem. It is *they*, rather than ourselves, who have composed the great hymns that we sing, translated the Bible that we study, written the important volumes that make up our Christian libraries. Yes, they are Christian, and we should be thankful for the great service they have been to the cause that we love.

And yet the answer is *no*. I cannot believe that the Baptist Church is *the* Church of Christ, or that the Presbyterian Church is *the* Christian Church. They are rather sects; they are divisions within the body of Christ. But this does not mean that they are necessarily made up of sectarians. A congregation of Presbyterians may unwillingly be part of a *divided* Christianity. They did not create such a condition; they inherited it. They might be ever so willing for their own sect within Christendom to be dissolved into the one great Church of God on earth, and may be eagerly working to that end. Such ones

would not be sectarians even if within the context of a sectarian Christianity.

Are these churches "in error?" — a term with a peculiar connotation among our people. Well, I would suppose so, just as we all are. The point about being "in error" is in what respect one is erroneous. Is he right about the Christ? Is the Lord dear to him? Is he dedicated in heart and soul to do the will of God as he comes to understand that will? He may be "in error" about any number of things (as surely we all are) and still be right in attitude.

What I have said about Baptists and Presbyterians would likewise be true of the "Church of Christ" or "Christian Church." These also are sects within the divided church. We are sects like the others because we too stipulate conditions for fellowship that separates us from others who are children of God. When we say that one must believe and practice as we do about singing (instrumental music) or preaching methods (missionary societies) in order to be within our fellowship, we are sectarian. But we are not *all* sectarians even if we be within the context.

This means that all of us who love Jesus and who truly desire the fellowship of every child of God must work and pray together for the unity for which our Lord prayed. To do this we must defy the party lines that separate us. This can be done only by love.

"Above all things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Col. 3:14)—*the Editor*.

By ROBERT R. MEYERS

(Minister, Riverside Church of Christ,  
Wichita, Kan.)

It is accepted that one man will alert another when he knows a killer is abroad. Men of goodwill think it is right to put unregenerate murderers away from an innocent populace, to reform reckless drivers, and to wipe out cancer.

By the same token Christians, who value the spirit infinitely more than the body, worry about spiritual murder. They know that a killer stalks who maims and often quenches the spirit, and they know the name of the killer. It is often called legalism. Paul described its work when he said, "The letter of the Law leads to the death of the soul . . ." (1Cor. 3:6, Phillips).

The language is not too harsh; legalism does kill. But of course no one sets out deliberately to become a legalist, so no one ever admits being a carrier. Legalism is an insidious thing; it disguises itself so that its victims do not recognize it. And often angry people call one another by the name with no clear notion of what the word means.

The problem seems to be one of definition. What *is* legalism? Probably its victims will gladly turn from it if it can be adequately described to them, and those who may be absent to embrace it will turn from it with relief.

One is tempted to use the dictionary definition of legalism as "undue emphasis on law." But like many dictionary definitions it is rather too simple. By itself it suggests there is nothing wrong with law itself, nor even with an emphasis on law. Only an excessive

emphasis on it leads to an attitude called legalism, a distortion and an injurious thing.

But this is misleading when one transfers it from the secular to the religious world. Partly because one enters a world of grace, and partly because the word *law* is clearly used in at least two senses by Paul, who was more concerned with legalism than any other New Testament writer.

Paul repeatedly denounces law as a way of life. At times he is speaking of Jewish laws and their elaborations, but at other times he is more general and rejects the very principle of law (externally imposed restraints) as the means to abundant spiritual life. The interested student should read Romans with care in the New English Bible and consult a good critical commentary for help in seeing when Paul uses the adjective *the* to limit himself to the Law of Moses, and when he omits it to refer to the whole principle of law.

One who reads Romans carefully will know that when Paul speaks with approval of the *law of Christ* (Gal. 6), he must necessarily mean something quite different from what he has condemned. The *law of liberty* and the *law of love* are both synonymous phrases for the *law of Christ*, and none of them mean what Paul meant when he said that the letter of the law leads to death. For Paul, the letter is law in the external sense. The Spirit, which gives life, is law in the internal sense and is so radically different that it can



best be described by paradox as the *law of liberty*.

We may move further with our definition now. A legalist in religion is one who has an overly-strict and overly-literal enthusiasm for codebook law. By giving his primary attention to externals, he tends to neglect more important matters of disposition. As his obsession grows, he begins looking anxiously for more laws, so that he may obey and thus add to his stature. He thrives on them and must have them. He learns to fabricate them from the sheerest gossamer, spinning with marvelous dexterity. To such a man, all of the Bible is a catalog of injunctions. He is quite unable to understand what Paul meant by saying that the letter, or law, kills. He will not believe that his legalism is a hopeless, destructive way of life.

The true legalist is like a father I know. He works very hard to do all the right things a father should do. He joins clubs, plans outings, and seizes every chance to act the way a father is supposed to act. The only trouble is that he has never been able to love and accept his son.

The son has never been fooled. He fears his father and he is in deep trouble at school. He has been rejected, despite all the external signs, and he knows it. Somehow the father needs to be helped to know why he has rejected his son. It happens that he is himself the victim of a tragically broken home, and apparently because of that he cannot accept his own son in a normal, spontaneous, unforced relationship. The result is that everything in that family is souring and infinite tragedy lies ahead. One day the father will say bitterly, "I don't understand

you; I did everything a father could do for you."

The legalist is in the same predicament. He cannot surrender in natural, spontaneous love for God, but his sense of duty and responsibility make him conscious that something is wrong. He tries, often frantically, to achieve the proper relationship. He races about *doing* things for which he must have credit so as to solace the insistent whisper inside that something is still wrong. One of the surest signs of the legalist is his urgent concern about proper credit. He is furious with those who are more relaxed, or who question the necessity for some of his rules, for this seems to invalidate his whole structure of security.

For him it is simply true that he has not fallen in love with Christ, nor invited the Holy Spirit to be resident in his heart. What should flow naturally from a state of being is sought through artificial turnings and twistings, but it never comes right. His life sours; he may even crack up.

To enlarge the definition again, legalism is a philosophy which teaches that one can attain to righteousness and favor with God through keeping laws. It cannot be said too often that this is not the same as claiming that righteousness has nothing to do with laws. But the matter is one of priority and emphasis, and even of a difference in the nature of two kinds of law.

The gospel of grace holds that there are not enough commandments on earth to make a man righteous, even if he kept them all. Righteousness is a gift from God, an expression of mercy, an outpouring of divine love. Man enters into such a relationship only when he trusts God and accepts him,

humbly grateful that God gives him a status he has not earned and could never earn.

After God's favor is given to the man who accepts him in trust, eager to know His mind and discover His purposes, there comes such joy that one can hardly think in terms of law, anymore than the lover can who seeks to learn how he may please his beloved. How often have parents been amazed to see a child whose obedience has been reluctant and grudging suddenly turn into the most ardent slave when he falls in love with the girl next door. From constant and plaintive "Do I have to's?" he begins asking, "Mom, how do I show Mary how I feel. Tell me some ways." The difference between his first attitude and his second is the difference between legalism and the contact of life with life.

It is not that the man who accepts God in a non-legalistic way is indifferent to His will. Matthew 7 shows how foolish this would be. As a matter of fact, such a concern goes beyond law. This is the very point of Matt. 5:20. The boy who behaves within the requirements of the law toward his school playmates is not the same boy who falls in love with one of them, accepts her love in return, and then does everything but stand on his head (and sometimes that) to show her how much he cares.

The basic error in legalism is simply that it does not lead to the right relationship with God. Since Christ has defined Him as Father it is no longer possible to know him adequately as Governor. Doing the will of God is not to be viewed as a way of winning His favor or of escaping His wrath. We must not believe that if we refrain

from a stated number and kind of taboos we will automatically grow spiritually strong. We may touch no taboo objects through a lifetime, yet never fill the vacuum inside. What is worse, we may grow so proud of our clean fingers that our empty heart does not dismay us. This is the ultimate horror of legalism.

But I feel even as I write that all such attempts to define abstractly are poor things. We may do better to seek the concrete, living examples that teach us dramatically what legalism is. We rightly begin with Christ. In watching His reaction to legalism we may come to know what it is.

The healing of man on the Sabbath in John 5 makes a good beginning. It had been debated with solemnity in the rabbinical schools whether a man with a wooden leg could walk on the sabbath without violating that holy day. Since the leg is a burden, some argued that he must not; they cited a rule that no one was to carry burdens on that day. Others argued that the leg was now part of the man, hence no burden. This kind of ever literalness and hair-splitting always lies close to the heart of legalism. It is one symptom by which the disease can be identified.

Jesus demonstrated that God's requirements are not all equal. Compassion may take precedence over meticulous Sabbath-keeping. Love may set aside the lower requirements of ritual. In Luke 13 Jesus healed on the Sabbath a woman eighteen years sick. In Mark 3 He healed a man with a withered hand. He ran into trouble in each case because he violated the technicalities of Sabbath observance. He insisted that love for people in need transcends rigid literalism. In the Mark incident

He looked with anger upon the stony-hearted legalist who condemned his action as a violation of God's law. He clearly saw it, in these contexts, as a *fulfillment* of God's law.

In Luke 14 He healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath. In Matthew 12 His disciples plucked and ate grain on the Sabbath. Again, in both cases, He was attacked. The point he was trying to make constantly was that the Sabbath was made by God as a gift to be used, and to be used rightly. But it was made for man (Mark 2:27) and not man for it. It was meant to serve, not to enslave. When any supposed requirement enslaves man instead of freeing and maturing them, it must be re-examined.

If we would understand from these examples that Jesus was concerned with *principles* rather than with *rules*, we could avoid the aridity of legalism. Principles are alive. Their roots go deep into permanent realities, but branches and leaves accommodate themselves to changing environments. Take for example, Paul's admonition that women should not wear gold, pearls, or costly garments (1 Tim. 2:9). Legalistically interpreted, this quickly carries us into nonsense in a time when most of the splendid Christian women we know violate the letter of this comment.

But there is a principle behind Paul's remark, and that principle will always have relevance for those who honor Christ and His men. The principle is that Christian women should not so dress as to bring into disrepute the great cause they represent. I can imagine no time or place in which this principle would not make sense. A literalistic reading of the New Testa-

ment as a catalog of rigid rules can make that book grossly unsuited for any age but the first century—and only a part of that!

Take another example. When Paul told Christians to greet with a holy kiss, an obstinate insistence upon the imperative force of his words would rule that this must still be an "item" of worship today. But Christians more sensibly sought the principle of which this rule was momentarily a flowering. When the rule became a problem, they changed the rule but hung on to the principle. They substituted a handshake as the external showing of brotherhood and love. This violates the *letter* of Paul's quadruple order (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 Thessalonians), but not its *spirit*.

This is what I mean by saying that principles have enduring relevance, because they find their proper expression in each age. Loyalty to a principle may actually mean having to apply it differently in different times. One may have to violate the letter to keep the spirit. This is difficult, of course, and we must have help beyond our feeble selves. So Christ gave help in the form of the Holy Spirit. Because we are sons, He sends that Spirit into our hearts crying out a recognition of God's Fatherhood. And the man whose heart cries "Father!" is in a new relationship, and in a fair way to interpret and apply principles wisely to the new situations he faces daily. If *he* is not, who is?

Theodore Ferris speaks magnificently to this issue: "Jesus, knowing these things, did not promise to leave his disciples a book of rules which would tell them what to do in every conceivable situation. Neither did he promise to leave them a code of laws, nor a

final court of authority. He promised to give them a spirit—the Spirit of Truth—and that spirit would guide them into all truth.

"He took for granted that situations would arise which neither he nor they could foresee. No lawbook would be sufficient. He did not go around the law; he went above it to something infinitely higher, to the reality of God himself to which each human being must respond in each new situation with all the vigor and spontaneity of which he is capable."

He adds this comment about modern times: "The church has always been in danger of forfeiting this invaluable bequest of Jesus. A system is so much safer than a spirit; it is more definite, more certain. Put a man on an assembly belt of an ironclad system and, provided no major catastrophes shake him off, he is safely and surely on the way to salvation, with all directions given. Endow him with a spirit, and tell him to surrender his mind and soul to it, to be ready for every new intimation and every fresh advance; tell him that he does not yet know all truth, that he may have to make revisions and corrections in what he already believes; tell him these things and you lead him into dangerous ways. Tell him anything else and you lead him into the way of certain and final death."

Legalism is forever doomed to failure. This is true, first, because there cannot be laws given for every conceivable situation. The legalist must often look in vain for specific rules. He has learned to rely on them and to turn to them in crisis; when they are lacking he must seek help from some more skilful legalist. He "calls the preacher" to learn what the rule is for

a given situation. That a divine spirit indwelling might, if cultivated and consulted, guide him in these circumstances, he refuses to believe.

Legalism is hopeless, second, because even if laws had been given for every possible situation, no man could remember them all. Or keep them if he could remember. Paul learned this and disclosed it so poignantly that it is a wonder we could ever forget it. The law, he argued, may define sin and reveal penalties for violation, but it has no power within itself to help a man do the right thing. In fact it works the opposite. The definition of sin and the threat of punishment work on human psychology in such a way that they actually *incite* to sin. One *wants* to test the definition, to defy the threat. With no countering force within him, he is doomed to just this kind of rebellion.

Paul was elated when he discovered the countering force, the presence within him of the mind of Christ. Everything he had had before he now counted as refuse compared with this treasure. Instead of endless, dreary codes he found a living spirit. Instead of constant guilt over inability to know or keep all the rabbinical laws, he found the humbling experience of accepting Christ's love, grace and forgiveness. Instead of supposing arrogantly that he had kept the law, or moaning in despair that it was impossible to keep, he found health in saying, "I am a sinner, but Christ dwells in me and I *am being transformed*." His attitude toward others changed dramatically. He no longer had to kill those who did not see things as he did. It was quite a step.

We forget that Paul's "new life" in Christ, that blessed condition about

which he exults so rapturously, was new because it was at the opposite end of the pole from his former legalism. All his life had before been bound up in externals. A Pharisee of the Pharisees, he knew the rules better even than his colleagues. The catastrophic thing that happened to him was that he learned how futile is a religion which puts main emphasis on externals, and how soaring is the music of a new spirit.

This is why he could be ecstatic about "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). What can such a statement possibly mean to a legalist? What liberty has he, this man enslaved by fear that a misunderstanding of some ritual, however honest, will damn his soul forever?

Paul found out that his zeal for the letter of the law had led him to commit murder in good conscience. The spirit of the gracious Christ could never murder his enemies, or plan any form of retaliation. Paul saw that with the spirit of Christ in one, he could be saved from cruelties which the letter of the law might allow him.

The failure to learn this has caused men of legalistic minds to bathe the world in blood through adherence to their code. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," said the law. So came the European witch hunts and the Salem insanity, all in the name of religion. Men lacking the spirit of Christ were unable to know what to do with that statement. Men with the spirit of Christ would have known that whatever it may mean, it cannot be used to justify murder of old women.

Men lacking the spirit of Christ put Latimer and Ridley to death; their counterparts tortured and killed Jesuits

during the reign of Elizabeth. All parties cited law. All parties quoted scripture. Law can be used, abused, twisted and rationalized by men lacking the guiding influence of a spirit of compassion. No one, in fact, is more terribly dangerous than the clever lawyer who has at his fingertips more minutiae of commandment than most of us could ever master, but whose heart is cold, unredeemed and inhuman.

It is an eternal story, this battle between those who put primary emphasis on external and those who seek to transform the heart and make it the habitation of God. What must always happen is that the rigid stress on externals robs people of originality and creativity. It stifles initiative. It breeds pride. The heart grows cold and static. It is the difference between a prohibition lying on the shelf and a seed forever exposed to soil and sun and rain. The life of the spirit, like a plant or a fountain, is forever springing forth into new life in every moment.

The law had *restrained* Paul, the new spirit *constrained* him. What a world of difference between the two! In outward conduct one might see little difference, but the *reason* for acting is different and the character takes its color from the difference. A real mother, for example, needs no statute book from the state to keep her from criminal negligence. Her love for her child carries her far beyond any state's requirements. She does not beat, or neglect, because she loves. And she sits up all night, even though the state does not require it, because she loves.

Have you ever known a child who obediently kept a long list of rules until one day, in an unexpected kind of trouble, he said triumphantly, "You

never told me not to!"? This child is still a legalist. He obeys for some selfish reason, not because he loves. When he comes at last to love he will know that not being told is no excuse for neglecting love's promptings.

Everyone who reads these words will have heard someone say that emphasis on love and the promptings of the Spirit is soft. Legalism, it is implied, is hard and demanding; only the noble Christian can rise to it. Nothing could be more false. Exactly the reverse is true. You have seen already that the mother who loves responds far beyond the call of anyone's duty list.

Actually the way of the legalist is popular because it is *easier* than the way of the creative and loving spirit. It is simpler to submit to an arbitrary code of rules than to go through birth-pangs and come into a demanding, sacrificial relationship with God's love. The rich young ruler had kept all the rules, he said. He may have been overconfident. Christ, willing to show him the condition of his heart, imposed a new condition. It was one which the law did not demand, but which love prescribed for the young man's particular illness. The rule-keeper, proud as he was of his status, could not find the courage to go beyond the law. He turned away. This should forever silence the legalist's charge that those who denounce legalism do so only because they are too soft for its demands.

What is pleasing about legalism is that it appears to have recognizable limits at any given moment. Every child likes to be told precisely what he must do, so that he may tick off the requirements and then go out to play with a relieved conscience. Christianity is not so easy as that. You cannot tick off the laws, or know the limits of

duty, because with every changing situation your response and duty may change. This is why only a living spirit, like an eternal fountain, can flood with water every sterile desert one stumbles upon in the long journey.

The legalist likes the security offered by the fences. There they are, and here he is, and he has obviously not trespassed. He is, then, all right. All right until he is tossed by circumstances into a new pasture, where it is hard to be sure just where the fence is. Then he panics. This is why legalists so seldom want to have a sympathetic relationship with those who differ from them. In strange pastures, hearing persuasive new arguments, they get a sudden, terrifying vision of fences fading out. Such insecurity they cannot bear, and they eagerly rush back home. Legalism is always eager to inbreed, to isolate the flock, to keep from knowing well the stranger.

Far better are the fences one is always ready to build from the material of his own spirit when the situation demands it. All things may be lawful for Paul, but not all things are expedient. There may be no fence in sight, but his love can build one instantly when love demands it. This is the true liberty about which Paul rhapsodized. Not liberty to do anything one likes but liberty to put the principle of love against any conceivable situation and trust in its potency. No one who experiences it ever goes back to legalism. No wonder Paul was astonished that the Galatians so lightly valued their freedom; clearly, they had not yet understood its merits.

There are by-products of legalism which are almost as bad as the initial error. One of them is the manufacture of rules where none existed or were

ever meant to exist. If one gets favor with God by rule-keeping the smart thing to do is to make some more rules, keep them, and get even more favor. This is why legalism, in every religion and in every age, has tended to run into rampant codifying. The Pharisees put burdens to heavy to bear on others, simply because they kept making up more and more laws. Since they kept more than anyone else, they were obviously better than anyone else. It was this fallacy which Christ tried so hard to destroy; it was this fallacy which gives point to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

Another by-product of legalism is excessive pride. Believing that he has found more rules, and kept more rules, than anyone else, the legalist judges himself the truest son of God. Those who interpret differently, who fail to follow his ritual forms, who decline to accept his list of taboos en masse, are brushed off as indifferent or dishonest. The legalist walks the high road to that deadliest of all dangers: spiritual pride.

And a third by-product is this: the legalist breeds even more zealous legalists when he proselytes. The blight and the new infection is often more virulent than the old. "You lawyers," Jesus said, "travel over sea and land to win one convert; and when you have won him you make him twice as fit for hell as you are yourselves." (Matt. 23:15, NEB). The legalist proselytes to bring prestige to his party; he is not intent upon God, or even upon the convert, but upon strengthening the exclusive cult which feeds his ego. He is so marked by self-righteousness that the attitude is almost inevitably passed on to the neophyte. With natural ties of affection weakened by his new com-

mitment, the convert is adrift. If his guide has been a bigot, chances are he will be an even greater bigot in his search for moorings and security. If his guide has been a legalist, he will seek to outdo his guide in legalism so that he may win approval. The infant legalist must outstrip the adult! How often have I seen recent converts ten times harder and grimmer than the legalist who brought them into their sad predicament with law.

There is hope in the very fact that legalism is not ultimately satisfying. There are searching questions which destroy the security of the legalist. "Am I really content with what I am inwardly? Have I stifled the secret longing, the ignoble thought, the gnawing envy, the searing hate? I memorize rules of external conduct, I quote verses, I go through the rituals — but the poison remains within me. What is wrong?"

What is wrong is that we cannot remake ourselves. Emphasis on external conduct cannot transform us. The direction is not from without to within, but from within to without — and here lies the whole story in summary. Jesus tried to tell us often enough, certainly. Not what goes into the mouth, but what comes out. Not what skill the head or hand may attain, given disciplines to scan and time for practice, but what warmth of love and creativity of spirit the heart may produce if it is truly surrendered to God. Such a heart knows that only God can make a new creature. It yields up all pride in its own accomplishments. It knows Who has done this glorious thing, and its humility lasts and lasts.

"Then, on the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out: 'If any man is thirsty, he can

come to me and drink! The man who believes in me, as the scripture said, will have rivers of living water flowing from his inmost heart.' (Here he was speaking about the Spirit which those who believe in him would receive...)" John 7:37-39. *Living water!* Not stag-

nant ponds held carefully in by artificial banks and slowly rotting, but sparkling, running streams that come from the high places of God's spirit and go abroad forever seeking to make fresh and green the desert places of the world. *Living water!*



## Truth Seekers' FORUM

CURTIS H. LYDIC, Editor

### THE GREAT PERVERSION

Ours is a time of great irony, religiously. Original purposes have been denied, original plans thwarted. Christ's prayers, addressed to the Father, have received of men a negative reply. He who was head of a submissive body is now, to a great extent, only a figure-head to a self-willed organization. A movement which began with marvelous strength of purpose has become a convulsive writhing in the dust.

For example: the church of Christ likes to think of itself as a great army, with Christ as the head, arrayed in might against the power of evil in the world; an army certainly, inevitably victorious. Witness its hymns: "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," "Faith Is the Victory," "There's A Royal Banner," etc. Yes, it is an army; but the conflict for lost souls has become less interesting than the rivalries within the army itself. So the campground of Christ's forces has become the battleground, and confusion prevails there while the forces of Satan gather the spoils unhindered.

Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." The people of God, living and working after the example of Jesus, can illuminate their surroundings and provide an attraction to which the lost would swarm like moths to an electric bulb. But the light which now most strongly emanates from the city on the hill is from the fires of war and destruction, and the passers-by of the darkness have become so used to the spectacle that it is not the explosions, but the brief interludes of silence, which occasionally make them look up in wonder.

Jesus made his disciples "fishers of men," and sent them forth to seine the streams of society. But before their work was finished, the task was turned into a great competitive fishing derby, with the fishermen choosing their teams, and casting their nets and lures into one another's storage tanks as a favorite source of prize trophies.