

Intercontinental Church of God

27. The Christian Relationship with Fellow Man

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Just as man has an obligation toward his Creator, he also has responsibilities toward his fellowman. A Christian must love his neighbor as himself, regardless of his neighbor's racial, ethnic, religious or social background; he must be a light to the world by setting a proper example, and he must do good toward all men as the opportunity arises.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Christians do not live in this world by themselves. They are just one segment of humanity, and are surrounded by persons of other religions, backgrounds, nationalities and creeds. In fact, all humans must face the reality that they live in a world consisting of other humans who are to a greater or lesser degree different from themselves. The Christian fully recognizes this reality and strives to live in harmony and peace with all men everywhere.

The apostle Paul set some basic guidelines for how a Christian should respond to the world around him when he says that the true believer must live in the world (i.e., function within the society in which he finds himself) but not be a part of those practices, actions or attitudes that are contrary to God's way of life (1 Cor. 5:9-10). John wrote that although Christians must be "in" the world, they are not to be "of" the world. Jesus did not pray that God should take His disciples out of the world, but rather that God should protect them from evil (John 17:15).

Race Relations in the Church

Jesus Himself laid down the highest standard for a human in relation to his fellow man when He described the second most important command as being "you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39). This love for neighbor must transcend the human barrier of racial, ethnic and social background. It arises above the human weaknesses of jealousy, envy, hate and bitterness. It teaches man how to hate the sin, but to have compassion for the sinner, and it must grow to the place where a man will even have love for his enemies when they are persecuting him.

Of course, the ultimate example of Christianity for all generations and times was set by Christ Himself, who gave His life for all sinners. Philippians 2 shows that He emptied Himself of His power and glory as a member of the godhead and came to the earth, not to be served or waited upon, but as a servant of all mankind. His every action and thought while on earth depicted the epitome of true Christian outgoing concern; this serving attitude is perhaps best illustrated by His willingness to die pitifully on a tree between two criminals. Thus Jesus Himself personified the greatest love a Christian can have for another which, by Jesus' own words, was to lay down one's life for a friend.

Loving one's neighbor means that a Christian must not harbor racial prejudice within his heart. The official doctrine of the Church is that discrimination toward persons because of race or ethnic origin is wrong and totally contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Almighty God is the Creator of the different races of man. He puts no spiritual distinction between these races (Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:28; etc.). In the Kingdom of God, there will be no racial stigma of any kind. The Church of God strives to reflect the coming Kingdom of God in its attitudes toward race at the present time.

God is no respecter of persons; He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-35; James 2:2). He deals justly with all men. There is no double standard with the Almighty:

"There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (Ex. 12:49; cf. Num. 15:15, 16).

How to deal justly and how to love one's neighbor is set forth plainly by Paul in Philippians 2:2-4:

"Complete my joy, by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit; but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The giving of esteem, one to another, is a two-way street. To love one's neighbor is to be concerned for his spiritual and physical welfare. To love one's neighbor means to respect him, to admire his accomplishments. The point of Philippians 2:2-4 is that a Christian must radiate the attitude and the actions of unselfish service toward his fellow man. He must esteem his fellow Christians better than himself, because he knows his own weaknesses in contrast to his brothers accomplishments. It is this attitude of love and concern which is imperative if we are to have proper individual and group relationships.

Ethnic integration of the races is as much a factor of modern western society as was integration of various ethnic groups in the Roman society of the first century. The example of the early history of the New Testament Church was to show no partiality between Jew, Greek or any other ethnic group.

"Truly I perceive," said the apostle Peter, "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation everyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34-35). And again, God has "made no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9; Gal. 2:11-16).

While the political situation in some few areas of the world may require a limitation of social integration, this is not a doctrine or overall policy of the church. In matters of church fellowship and office, there is no discrimination because of ethnic background. Different ethnic groups are free, of course, to preserve their own culture and identity, including having such church-sponsored ethnic socials as a Latin dance or a German evening. But the church does not teach or practice a regular segregation of different ethnic groups in its services. Members are encouraged to get to know the members of groups in its services. Members are encouraged to get to know the members of groups other than their own. Only then can they appreciate the qualities of others and practice that love of one another which is the central message of the Bible.

In matters of church fellowship and office, there should be no discrimination because of ethnic background. The criteria for baptism are repentance and belief. Ordination to the ministry—at whatever level—is based on those spiritual criteria indicated in the Bible, such as conversion and calling. Ethnic origin is no factor. This is the present belief and practice of the church, and it holds this to be in accord with the Bible and the mind of God.

Over the years, the term "integration" has been tarnished with the corrosive taint of emotionally loaded epithets. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "integrate" in the primary sense to mean: "to make whole or complete by adding or bringing together parts ... (secondarily) unity."

God has integrated His church to teach us His way of harmony between peoples. It is this Christian unity, the Christian culture and the mind of Christ, rather than the rigid ideas and entrenched biases of men, which unites rather than separates us and which will determine how "integrated" or fitly framed together we (the Church of God) really are (see I Cor. 12:12-27).

Misunderstandings have often arisen from incorrectly interpreting another's thoughts or motives about what is true integration. When the topic of race relations is brought up, many in the white community tend to think

immediately of the question of racial intermarriage. The black and other minority communities, by contrast, are more concerned about having the same opportunities for education, work, advancement and economic reward that the average white citizen has, than about interracial marriage or ethnic assimilation.

Minority people perceive their struggle for justice, fair play and racial equality to be life and death attempts to stay afloat in a competitive society while shooting the rapids of racial prejudice and injustice. Human cultures have their inherent weaknesses. So long as this present evil world stands, there will always be unjust weights and measures—something God Almighty hates.

Church history reveals that the attitude of contemporary society has, to one degree or another, always been reflected in religion. But we in the Church of God cannot allow society to determine our racial mores and standards, nor to force us into its mold of racial bigotry. Our conduct is rather to be exemplary of the principles set forth in the pages of the Bible. Our unity cannot be artificial, but a clear expression of Christian love.

Race relations in the church can be termed human relations—the attitude, respect, appreciation and brotherhood that should be expressed among all races. We are admonished by the Word of God to be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren: not just loving in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. And who are our brethren? Christ clearly answers this for us: "For *whosoever* [regardless of race] does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50). God does *not* see as man sees, nor does He look on the outward appearance.

The integrated Church of God is the herald of God's Kingdom and a new culture, wherein God's perfect government will at once banish racial discrimination, while urging all families of the human race to develop to the fullest their unique ethnic human potential.

In view of the grave importance of marriage—for what it symbolizes, for the stability of society and for the happiness of the individual—the Church of God strongly urges that dating and marriage emphasize similar racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The reason for this is to insure the greater likelihood of mutual compatibility between marriage partners and the predictability of patterns of appearance, talent and temperament in their children and that their children may fit in with society more easily.

Furthermore, God created the races and national groupings of families; He created the diversity in man to encourage the richness of cultural experiences and to generate the combined creative product of divine contributions to society. Consequently, God wants each ethnic group to take *pride* in its own origin and heritage. In the world tomorrow, there will be different races and nations and each will be encouraged to maintain and strengthen its own identity and culture; most marriages, therefore, will preserve this identity and culture by remaining within traditional boundaries.

Wise marriages are those which match people suited for each other. Compatibility may be determined by consideration of the many different traits of personality, cultural background, intellect, character and even physical features. A marriage in which neither partner properly understands the other's language is not likely to be the most fulfilling. The same general considerations come into question when people of two obviously diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds consider marriage. Two people could, hypothetically, be compatible though of diverse racial backgrounds. In actual practice, such differences usually imply other important differences which will compete with rather than complement each other.

The church cannot and does not forbid people of the *same* race or ethnic background to marry even when unsuited for one another. Likewise, we cannot and do not forbid people of *different* racial or ethnic backgrounds to marry even though such marriages may not be wise. The church simply does not attempt to regulate who one may or may not marry. (And no stigma must ever be attached to children that may result from such a union—though in the world they may well face social strains and heartaches.)

There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can do through the individual that submits himself to God. God's church is exhorted to break the bonds of prejudice by putting on the "new man" which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision ... bond or free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:9-11); It is the responsibility of each church member to repent of past wrong attitudes toward those of other race or ethnic groups. We are all one in Christ and must have that Christian love for all which only God's Spirit makes possible.

Christian Responsibility in the Community

A Christian must set an example in all areas of life. He is not blind to the evils of this society. He sees that the vast majority of nations and individuals are living and acting in opposition to God's perfect law. The effects of crime, pollution and immorality are all obvious—the poor are oppressed, wars are waged, hatred between peoples flourishes. But a Christian must differentiate between sin and the sinner, between evil and the evildoer.

The proper attitude is for a Christian to hate the deeds of the evildoer, but to retain love for the one who Himself set a perfect example in this regard by deprecating sin and by giving His life for all sinners at the same time (John 3:16). This love for the evildoer is not a self-righteous, condescending attitude, attitude, however, but rather *compassion* for one who is essentially ignorant of his own spiritual blindness. Indeed, every Christian himself was and is part of this society and has been, and unfortunately all too often still is, a partaker of its sins.

But to condemn everything the world has ever done as "evil" would be shortsighted in the extreme, and would broadcast one's ignorance of the vast advances mankind has made in the areas of science and technology, medicine, art and literature, and also the good millions have done through charity. Christians are nevertheless admonished to avoid "worldliness." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... For all that is in the world, the lust of the—flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). Worldliness is partaking of the norms of society (vanity, false pride, greed, envy, lust, strife) instead of the godly values of love, concern, giving and helping one's neighbor. A Christian should avoid those activities and attitudes of mind which oppose God's law in its letter and in its intent.

The church places great stress upon the need for Christians to serve their fellow man: "...by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word ... love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13-14). The obligation for us to "look on the needs of others" (Phil. 2:4) extends beyond the family and the church to embrace all of one's neighbors—indeed humanity as a whole, who do not as yet have the blessing of knowing God's truth. Christians should "always seek to do good to one another and *to all*" (1 Thess. 5:15), and be zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). A Christian is thus ultimately known by what he *does*, and not alone for what he professes. "Pure religion," as defined in James 1:27, "is to visit the fatherless and widows." Caring for the needy, or neglecting too, is tantamount to doing the same to Christ, according to Jesus' own words (Matthew 25:31-46). The church acknowledges that the need to serve one's fellow man should be filled both by the individual himself, and by the collective body of believers, the church. All persons need to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute" (1 Tim. 6:18). in his own private life.

One outstanding example is that of the "good" Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. This story was used by Christ to expound the second great commandment, and to define "who is my neighbor"; thus, the Christian learns whom he should serve. Jesus' point is that anyone in need is our neighbor, and believers have a duty to help others in such spontaneous one-on-one situations. We are encouraged by God's Word to earn extra money for the sole purpose "that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Likewise, those employed in certain service-oriented positions in society should use their individual opportunity to exert extra effort to improve the welfare of their fellow citizens within and without the Church of God.

Jesus told His disciples—and by direct extension He is telling all Christians—"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives

light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16). What "good works" is Jesus referring to? It cannot be the "good works" of prayer, Bible study, fasting, etc.—these must be done in private and not before men (Matthew 6:1-2). Obviously, the "good works" that Christians can do which non-Christians will praise must reflect a genuine, unfeigned *outgoing concern* for other people.

The church as a whole has an affirmative biblical responsibility to serve the nonbeliever by demonstrating its *collective outgoing concern* for the surrounding community. Since the church is a body with "many members," it develops the strength from those members to accomplish with an integrated, organized structure much more good for society and civilization than could its individual members accomplish by themselves.

The local church congregation, as the microcosm of the whole Church of God in the local community, should extend itself in whatever way will best serve its neighbor such as through programs to help the elderly, the sick and the blind. Such activities may vary from two church members simply volunteering their time to major church sponsored events. During time of disaster, emergency, or other special need, the membership should be willing to help with whatever physical and spiritual needs are made manifest. Each church congregation should strive to establish itself as a respected, *giving* part of the community, whose every motive and action is that of helping, serving and encouraging—in every way setting a positive example of the true Christian way of life. The church strives to carry out the apostle Paul's admonition: "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good to all men."

A Christian is also aware of his civic responsibilities and privileges. Paul wrote that Christians should be subject to the constituted human authorities. This included paying taxes and rendering due respect to the symbols of that authority (Rom. 13:1 ff). Jesus Himself paid a tax which He legitimately could have avoided (Matthew 17:24-27). Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because of the edict of the Roman emperor. The New Testament is filled with such examples of complying with government legislation and national custom where they did not conflict with God's laws. Church of God members have always shown patriotism by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem of their own country.

In some countries, voting is put on a par with other governmental requirements. The New Testament no more prohibits voting than it does paying taxes. The church does not attempt to legislate in the matter of voter registration or voting in local, regional or national elections.

The Church as an organization does not enter into this world's political affairs. It does not support any political party, nor attempt to influence its members to support or not support any issue or person. Of course, the church's *values* are well known in the community, and its very existence should therefore strengthen the support for moral decency, obedience to the constituted authorities and civic pride.

The church continues to stress the transient nature of earthbound political institutions. The Kingdom of God is not going to be voted in by men, but forcibly established by Jesus Christ. When the time comes, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). This is the ultimate goal of the Christian, and it is toward that eternal kingdom that he should expend his greatest efforts.

Jesus Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The kingdom a Christian looks and longs for is an eternal kingdom or government, not a temporal, physical, human one. Yet when Jesus said His disciples are not *of* this world, He also recognized all Christians are citizens of one of the many countries in the world. Neither does this negate the principle of having our "citizenship [state or country] ... in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV). The apostle Paul, who wrote the preceding statement about our true citizenship was himself a physical Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28).

Another area of civic concern is that of holding public office and serving on juries. The church in no way prohibits its members from such activities, and indeed the community would be well served by having true Christians fulfilling these functions. There are cautions here; Christians may find making certain judgments and rendering specific decisions difficult, because the laws of God can conflict with the laws of men, and their primary responsibility must be, to the former. Also, one who may serve (or wish to serve) in an elected governmental capacity must not involve himself with unchristian practices commonly associated with politics. No Christian should ever consciously compromise his inviolate values of love for God, fidelity to God's law and love for one's neighbor equal to himself. Nonetheless, the biblical examples of Joseph ruling Egypt and Daniel ruling Babylon are powerful statements about the capacity and opportunity of a true servant of God to serve (albeit rarely) in responsible governmental positions, even though their governments were still of this world.

Associated with jury duty is the question of whether a Christian should seek legal redress through the legal system. 1 Corinthians 6:1-9 categorically states that a Christian should not go to court against a fellow Christian. It says to do so is a "shame" (v. 5) and the one who does so has "[done] wrong" (1 Cor. 6:8). Matthew 18:15-20 adds that a Christian who feels that he has been wronged by his brother should approach that brother personally to resolve the problem. If the brother will not hear, he should take one or two witnesses and approach the man again. If he will still not respond, the injured party should take the matter to the officials of the church where a judgment can be made. (There are, of course, areas over which the civil authorities have total authority, i.e., the legal granting of divorce; in such cases, the civil courts must be resorted to, but only after all Christian duties toward a brother or a sister have been fulfilled.)

The question of whether a Christian should take a non-Christian to court is more complex. Obviously, a Christian should still use the same basic approach outlined in Matthew 18—first trying to resolve the issue between him and the offending party. However, it is equally obvious that a non-Christian will not abide by, or submit himself to, the authority of the Christian's church. This means that if a matter is still unresolved, a Christian may take a legal dispute to the recognized civil authorities (to whose authority the non-Christian will, of course, have to submit). The question of whether a Christian *should* take one to court under these circumstances must be an individual decision, based upon a balance between the principles of Christian forgiveness, and the man's responsibility to maintain his own integrity and rights before the laws of God and of man.

Questions also arise about a Christian's responsibility toward military service. It is axiomatic that *human* welfare and the attitudes behind it are the exact antithesis of God's law and the Christian way of life (James 4:1-2). Therefore, a Christian, who must put God's laws before man's (Acts 5:29), can in no way conscientiously participate in warfare. A Christian's firm conviction in this regard in no way negates his feelings of loyalty to his country, nor lessens the amount of positive Christian service he is willing to render for his country. His loyalty is, however, even deeper to his God and to his religious beliefs, and it is to God that he must be loyal when conflict between God and man arises (Acts 5:29). True patriotism thus puts one's country second only to one's God.

In summary, we as Christians and brothers of Christ must follow His example of genuine outgoing concern for our neighbor in our thoughts, actions and attitudes. This love for our fellow human being is far from being merely an emotional feeling in our hearts, but it is the very real act of living as servants by following the examples of Jesus Himself.

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

[The Intercontinental Church of God](#)

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