

FREEDOM'S RING

"Proclaim liberty throughout the land" (Lev.25:10).

Cecil & Lea Hook

17196 NW Woodmere Ct., Beaverton, OR 97006-4820

503-690-0826; <hookc@teleport.com> <<http://www.freedomring.org>>

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Terrible Times In The Last Days

"Our earth is degenerate in these latter days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Bribery and corruption are common. Children no longer obey their parents. Every man wants to write a book, and the end of the world is evidently approaching."

"We are living in a decadent and dying age. Youth is corrupt, lacking in respect for elders, impatient of restraint. Age-old truth is doubted and the teaching of the fathers is questioned. The signs of the time forecast the destruction of the world at an early date."

"Large numbers of these youngsters belong to organized gangs of thieves and cut-throats, and are in the regular employ of old criminals who teach them the tricks of the trade. Many such have no homes. Some cannot even return to the gang's headquarters, unless the day's profit amounts to a stipulated sum. From these thousands of young desperadoes, the chief mass of hardened criminals is recruited. Half the number of persons actually convicted of crimes are youths who have not reached the age of discretion."

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

In view of the foregoing, who can deny that the end is near?

The first quotation was inscribed on a tablet about 4800 years ago (2800 B. C.) now in the Municipal Museum at Istanbul. The second was inscribed in an Egyptian tomb ten centuries B. C. The third was written in 1831 as quoted in *The Atlantic Monthly* of December, 1926. The fourth was a cautioning of Paul for Timothy, not us, to have nothing to do with that kind of people whose sins prevailed in his generation in the last days of Judaism before their nation was destroyed (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Consider another "modern" outcry: "In the good old days every man's son born in wedlock was brought up, not in the chamber of some hired nurse, but in his mother's lap and at her knee, and that mother could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children. Nowadays, on the other hand, our children are handed over at birth to some silly little servant maid with a male slave, who may be anyone, to help her, quite frequently the most worthless

member of the whole establishment, incompetent for any serious service. Yes, and the parents themselves make no

effort to train their little ones in goodness and self-control. They grow up in an atmosphere of laxness and pertness in which they come gradually to lose all sense of shame and all respect, both for themselves and other people. Again, there are the peculiar and characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours taken on, as it seems to me, almost in the mother's womb, the passion for play actors and the mind for gladiatorial shows and horse racing. When the mind is engrossed in such occupations, what room is left for higher pursuits?" By substituting such modern words as *baby-sitter, day care, movie stars, basketball, and video games* this description by the historian Tacitus (d. 117 A.D.) would describe our present generation.

Some of these quotations are selected from the many given in a radio lesson, *The Good Old Days*, by W. L. Oliphant on KRLD, Dallas, Nov. 1, 1942. I shall adapt other of his thoughts also.

"Indulged, petted, and uncontrolled at home, allowed to trample upon all laws, human and divine, at school, the student comes to college often with an undisciplined mind and an uncultivated heart, yet with exalted ideas of personal dignity and scowling contempt for local authority and wholesome restraint." That commentary was by a professor of Davidson College in 1855.

Dr. Will Durant, describing the period following World War I, said: "Hope faded away; the generation which had lived through the war could no longer believe anything; a wave of apathy and cynicism engulfed all but the youngest and least experienced souls. The idea of progress seemed now to be one of the shallowest delusions that has ever mocked man's misery, or lifted him up to a vain idealism and a monstrous futility." (Harper's, Nov. 1926).

Add another war: "Our world has never experienced such fearful times. It would seem that we are about to destroy ourselves. Following the awful war, if any nation survives, it will be blasted by such evils as to make life near unbearable. Immorality, licentiousness, disrespect for orderly government, disintegration of home life – these must and will follow World War II to such a degree as they have never before been witnessed."

There seems to be an inherent self-centeredness in mankind that makes him feel that this universe will not outlast him. He thinks ideally that times past are the "good old days" and that mankind has lost its innocence in whatever age the person lives. Bible believers have tended to support those perceptions by Biblical prooftexts and have interpreted all sorts of natural disasters and social and political upheavals in their generation and locale as being evidence that a catastrophic end is impending. You just might, perchance, have heard a few of those alarmists in this generation! A hundred or several

thousand years from now, the twentieth century criers of doom may seem as amusing as those of the second century A. D. or 2800 B.C. are to us. And ten thousand years from now, there may still be doleful warnings of an impending cosmic dissolution.

Centuries before Christ, Solomon advised, **“Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this”** (Ecc. 7:10). He also reminds us of the endless, repetitious cycle of history: **“What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new?’ It has been already, in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things...”** (Ecc. 1:9-11). Being centered on the present, we are forgetful of the corruption of former ages and we idealize them as *the good old days*.

Solomon was not writing of inventions but of the general cycle of nature and of man’s efforts to gain satisfaction in it. There is no evidence that the morality of mankind or that his pursuit of happiness has changed throughout his existence on this earth. As each individual has been whirled in his brief spin in the cycle of time, his circumstance of locale, race, culture, and age might have differed from others, but universally the conditions have been similar.

We are not making light of evil. We are affirming that the depravity of man has been equally evident in all ages. We are distressed to see immorality and corruption become so accepted in our society, but it is not new to our society, nor is it equally true of all current cultures. In our time in the Western nations, freedom of speech and investigative reporting exploit the depravity of mankind. The Bible, however, reveals the evils of societies from the beginning of history. Secular history, though more suppressed and lacking in access to information, leaves no doubt about the perversity of man.

What worse time and situation could we point to than the garden of Eden after the fall when the earth’s total population was corrupted. Shortly thereafter one out of four persons on earth hated his brother enough to kill him. Noah lived in a corrupt society. At some time in history God gave the pagan nations up to dishonorable passions (Rom. 1-2). However, God has always had his remnant who have brought restoration and uprightness to prominence. As corrupt as our present society seems to be, there are probably more true believers today than at any time since Jesus walked the earth. In spite of the rebellious youth of the sixties in our country, there is a swelling number of youth today who are devoting their lives to God.

The following lines (unclaimed by any writer for obvious reason!) are more expressive of truth than of poetic artistry:

My grandpa notes the world’s worn cogs
And says we’re going to the dogs.
His grandpa in his house of logs
Said things were going to the dogs.
His grandpa in the Flemish bogs
Said things were going to the dogs.
His grandpa in his hairy togs
Said things were going to the dogs.
But this is what I wish to state:
The dogs have had an awful wait!

There have always been disastrous fires, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and storms as the elemental forces of nature expand, contract, and shift in unending adjustment. Neither locally nor universally are these destructive demonstrations predictive of a dissolution of the universe. Hebrew writers commonly used symbolic language of

cataclysmic natural disruptions to depict social, political, and national upheavals and changes. Jesus used such descriptions on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24; compare 2 Peter 2-3) and plainly stated that they would all be fulfilled in the generation of his listeners. Unfortunately, without discretion, present-day alarmists interpret those descriptions as literal, current, and local, fulfilling so-called “end times prophecies.” Such gullibility is not a convincing testimony for Christianity.

Although Paul cautioned Timothy about the terrible times in those last days, he did not leave him to despair. He assured, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

To the scattered disciples in the Empire, Peter encouraged, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and strangers in the world, to abstain from the sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2: 9-12).

Listen to Jesus again: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Believers can be victorious in the worst of times. []

Jesus’ Ear Was Pierced

Several times the following words (the author’s name is not given) have been sung by our congregation. Each time we sang them, I wondered how many of those participating understood to what the words allude.

*“Pierce my ear, O Lord my God.
Take me to your door this day.
I will serve no other god.
Lord, I’m here to stay.
For you have paid the price for me.
With your blood you have ransomed me.
I will serve you eternally.
A free man I’ll never be.”*

Surely, I had read Exodus 21:1-6 many times, but I had not seen the picture of Jesus until it was pointed out by our brother, Given O. Blakeley. There it is written: *“When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.”*

Though Jesus “was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a **servant (slave)**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8).

God gave some to him which he promised to raise up at that last day (John 6:37-39; 10:28-19; 17:2). Through his atonement he was able to say, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." He accepted servitude in order to deliver those subject to lifelong bondage (Heb. 2:10-18).

In his obedience even unto death he destroyed every rule and every authority and power, yet "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor. 15:24-28). This all relates to Jesus' death, resurrection, and his choosing to remain with us earthly creatures, the bride given him, in his continuing presence with us.

In all this Jesus chose to remain subject to his Father because of his love for his "wife and children," as it were – those whom God gave him. His ear was pierced as a perpetual witness of his slavery.

This was prophesied by David and Isaiah (Psalms 40:6-7; Isa. 50:5-6) in similar statements relating to his submission to death. David wrote, "Sacrifices and offering thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God..." (ASV). A footnote on the word translated opened reads "Ears hast thou digged (or, pierced) for me." His willingness to do the Father's will and accept the bearing of the marks of submission were symbolic fulfillment of the literal transaction described in Exodus 21.

In similar manner we choose to bear his marks in our bodies and lives, even as Paul chose, which give testimony of our willing slavery to him. We gladly display our pierced ears.

This brief essay is only suggestive. You may enlarge this theme with many relevant thoughts from the Scriptures. []

HOOK'S POINTS

January Report: We sent out only 46 free copies of *Free In Christ* in January, but God can use one book to help change more than one life. We trust him to use them as he wishes. Otherwise, it was a good month for sale of books. Thank you. You responded graciously in helping to replenish our working fund to \$2,022.54. Thank you for that also. Our web site was accessed over 2250 times.

I try to read and respond to every e-mail directed to me personally that requires an answer, but I do not have time to read much of the non-personal material sent. My days grow shorter all along. Instead of running with the chariots, I seem to be in a losing race with a turtle. If, in my confusion, I do not fill your order correctly, please let me know.

Although I try to keep records of all donations and payments, I do not have time to check for delinquent payments and to send out bills. However, it is not unusual for me to run across a file card that has a record of books purchased but no indication that they were ever paid for.

This mailout is free for the asking. If you receive it but do not read it for any cause, please let us know and we will remove your name. Send e-mail subscriptions or cancellations to <freedom@freedomring.org>.

Eat your heart out, Rodney Dangerfield. I get respect – in India. Dr. Prasad, who has distributed so many of my books in India, recently sent me pictures of his grandson who is about three years old. He is a cute little fellow of whom any Grandpa

would be proud. His name: Cecil Prasad (or in their custom, Prasad Cecil), a namesake! I am honored.

Many of the books have been given to university professors. The vice-chancellor of Andhra University sent me invitation through one of the disciples there to come to receive recognition by the university. And this brother urges me to come to India as a participating speaker for a great gathering of Christians possibly numbering 50,000 people. How about that for respect!

Can we hope for what is past, as in "I hope you had a great vacation"?

Totally by grace: In discussing the futility of efforts of justification by works of law, I wrote, "So it is all by grace! If one is to be saved, it must be totally by grace." (*Free In Christ*, p. 24). A few eager critics at various times have jumped on that and exulted, "See, he doesn't think we have to do anything to be saved!" What is grace? A gift, an unmerited favor. How much do you pay for the gift of salvation? What do you pay? If Jesus gives you salvation but you still have to pay a part, then his atonement is insufficient. If you teach that, I don't want to stand close to you in a thunderstorm! God has a part and man has a part, but God's part is to provide the free gift and man's part is to accept it. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8).

Cat lovers should find it easy to love all fellow humans. You have to love a cat for its own sake rather than for how it treats you! So it is with many people.

My mental disorder: It must be some sort of mental disorder that induces me to ask so many maddening questions! May a non-believer, Buddhist, or Muslim exhibit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (reliability), gentleness, and self-control – *fruit of the Spirit?* (Gal. 5:22). If so, do they have the Spirit, or do they accomplish it without the Spirit? If we say they can have no goodness of character, don't we show a wee bit of arrogance – which is not a fruit of the Spirit?

ONE BODY: The Winter issue of ONE BODY edited by Victor Knowles is devoted entirely to the subject of unity. Actually, that is the purpose of the fine publication. He favored me by giving a nice review of *Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship*, my book of selected writings of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Thank you, Victor.

A Web Page by Ron McRay offering his writings on fulfilled prophecies: <www.tyler.net/adifferentview>.

Church bulletins always report when someone is added by baptism. At the end of the year you might have seen reports of the total baptized during the last year. But how often do you read a report like this: Eleven persons were added by baptism in the last year, but thirteen were dropped from the roll because of their unfaithfulness? What! Tear off our facade of growth and success?

New Price List

We have tried to hold to our original nominal prices since *Free In Christ* was published in 1984 in order to facilitate distribution. We have relinquished the profit from thousands of books. During those years printing costs, publishing costs, and other expenses have doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled. So now we face the unpleasant task of raising the prices.

You may access these books at our web site, and we still offer *Free In Christ* free for distribution if you wish to pass along more than you can afford to buy. As you enable me, I will still provide books without charge to students, missionaries,

prisoners, and others who cannot afford them. It would be delightful to be able to distribute them all without charge, but we must sell some books for personal income in order to continue. (Besides over-the-counter drugs, our prescription drug bill for 1998 was over \$5400.00.)

We depend upon you to advertise and distribute the books. **Remember, books make excellent gifts.** Thank you for your wonderful support of this ministry.

Free In Christ, (\$5.00 or free for distribution)

Free To Speak, (\$5.00)

Free As Sons, (\$7.00)

Free To Change, (\$7.00)

Free To Accept, (\$7.00)

Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Writings of

Carl Ketcherside & Leroy Garrett, (\$12.00)

The Death of the Custodian, Ketcherside, (\$5.00)

The Twisted Scriptures, Ketcherside, (\$6.00)

"I Permit Not A Woman"..To Remain Shackled,

Robert Rowland (\$9.95)

The Stone-Campbell Movement, Garrett (\$22.00)

The Fire That Consumes, Edward Fudge (\$17.00)

Beyond the Sacred Page, Edward Fudge (\$9.00)

Questions & Answers, Edward Fudge (\$12.00)

"Generic Christian" bumper sticker, (\$1.00 postpaid)

(Please add \$1.50 postage for orders under \$30.00.)

Ananias and Paul on **CONVERSION**

During my formative years and earlier years of preaching, my people in the churches of Christ were much more aggressive in evangelism. This zeal was fired more fervently by our conviction that we had restored the true route to salvation which others had abandoned.

Many of our lessons were based on the accounts of conversion recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* which we sometimes described as the *book of conversions*. In strengthening our case, we analyzed each account, pointed to their parallel messages, and charted them all for comparison to show that the same thing was required of each convert.

While it is very questionable that Luke's record in Acts was purposely to show the route to God's forgiveness for us to use in evangelistic sermons, it remains that what he recorded was true. Though he was not teaching us lessons on how to find salvation, he told Theophilus in his historical narratives how different persons obtained that forgiveness. His details are in harmony with the Great Commission in which Jesus offered the benefit of his atonement to every creature (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; compare Luke 24:44-49).

Many times I used the exciting story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as illustrative of how a sinner receives

salvation. The points gained from such a study are still valid. What greater authenticity could we look for? Here is a direct intervention by Jesus, the giving of the Holy Spirit, the divine direction of Ananias, and the witness of the inspired apostle himself narrated toward the close of his ministry about a quarter of a century later. So please look again with me at this part of God's revelation. There are unsettling points for our confused religious community along with confirming assurances to be gained.

Some of this treatise will be negative in an effort to clear away much rank growth of theological interpretations which tend to hide the colorful, fragrant flower of truth.

Various details of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus related in Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21; 26:1-23 are reviewed briefly here. Saul, like a mythical, fire-breathing monster, was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." He was on his way to Damascus to arrest disciples and to bring them back to Jerusalem bound. As he approached Damascus, there came a blinding light exceeding the brightness of the noonday sun. He fell to the ground and heard an arresting call, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me. You are like kicking against an ox goad hurting yourself." "Who are you, Lord? What will you have me do?" The answer must have been an emotional thunderbolt! "I am Jesus! Go into the city and it will be told you what to do," the Voice replied.

This blinded, devastated conqueror was led by hand into Damascus where he prayed in deep contrition for three days without eating or drinking. The Lord then sent Ananias, a disciple living in Damascus, to Saul. Fearful of this notorious persecutor, Ananias was reluctant, but the Lord assured him that Saul had been chosen to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings and Israel. Then going to Saul and laying his hands on him, Ananias explained, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." After regaining his sight, Saul was urged, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name." "Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened."

Your full reading of these references is encouraged as we now make some observations about them and relate them to present-day teachings about receiving the grace of God through Christ.

Ineffective Formulas

Paul, addressing the Jewish council many years later, declared, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day" (23:1). No person should allow himself or herself to be condemned by violation of conscience, yet living with a clear conscience as Paul had done cannot save, for it would be a merited salvation. A person can be conscientious, God-fearing, and zealous while alienated from God. Looking back later, he would see himself as the chief of sinners at that time.

Those who rely upon a "saving experience" have been known to declare that Saul was saved "before he hit the ground." We have to look outside the Scriptures, however, to find mention of the popular concept of a saving experience. Emotional reactions are not evidences of forgiveness. Forgiveness is in the mind of God and is not felt in the mind of one forgiven. For example, while you read this you might forgive me of some offense but I would not feel it.

When Ananias, who received his instructions directly, came to Saul, he did not say, "Good brother, Jesus has appeared to you, so we can be sure you are saved!" If the appearance of Jesus did not save that sinner, what trust can we have in any sort of mystical experience or feeling today?

Neither did Ananias, after laying hands on him, declare, "Saul, you have received the Holy Spirit. You, the former enemy of Jesus and his disciples, no longer are burdened by those sins. You are forgiven!" This point is just as true as if the whole world believed it: There is no record of the Spirit saving anyone by a direct operation on the person; there is no record of the Spirit ever even telling anyone directly what to do to be saved. Jesus announced in the Great Commission and confirmed on Pentecost how a sinner might receive salvation, and there is no indication that he varied from that in specific cases. The Holy

Spirit guided us into all truth, but the Holy Spirit is not our savior. More about his work later.

Ananias did not assure Saul that Jesus had already saved him because “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, your will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Certainly, Saul had become a believer when Jesus appeared to him on the road, and he had expressed his submissive faith in contrition by asking Jesus what he wanted him to do. But he was not yet free from the guilt of his sins!

When the stricken, undone Saul, called out from the ground, “Lord, what shall I do,” Jesus did not soothe him with, “Saul, there is nothing for you to do. I have already done it all for you. You have nothing to answer for.” Jesus gave him instructions to follow and said that in the city more instructions would be given.

Ananias told Saul, “Just believe in Jesus and pray the sinner’s prayer,” didn’t he? Those who give that advice today know that Ananias did not give it to Saul. If he had, Saul might have rightly responded, “What do you think I have been doing the last three days and nights?” But it says, right there in Romans 10:13, “For **every one** who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.” So what else could be asked of Saul? His sins were already remitted. Really? Who says so, modern pulpiteers or the inspired writers?

With these various experiences in Saul’s favor in which seekers tend to trust for salvation or as evidence of having been forgiven, he still had not received that assurance. If he was saved instantaneously, he did not realize it for he inquired as to what to do and then followed the instructions given. If he was saved then, Jesus did not know it for he sent Ananias to him to tell him how to be rid of his sins. If he was saved before he hit the ground, the Spirit was not aware of it for he directed Ananias to inform him. Likewise, Ananias was not informed of it because, after those happenings and his explanation of why they happened, he urged Saul, “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” His sins still had not been remitted!

Sins Washed Away

There is no indication that Saul hesitated, questioning whether sin is something that can be washed from the body in water. He was familiar with the rituals of cleansing required by the Law of Moses in which he was schooled. He could understand the washing of baptism to be a ceremony of purification and that God accepted such an approved expression of faith inasmuch as it was impossible for a person to remit his own transgressions. The trust was in the grace of God rather than an efficacious or sacramental ritual. In later

times Paul never explained that Ananias was too simplistic and misled in directing him to wash away his sins in baptism. Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Galatians, written about twenty-five years after his conversion, in which he commented on baptism, justification by faith, confession, and calling on the name of the Lord were in complete harmony with the narrative of his conversion.

Saul’s obedience was under the direct guidance and supervision of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and a Spirit-directed disciple. It was in harmony with Jesus’ Great Commission to every creature and what Jesus had told Nicodemus in veiled language about a birth of water and the Spirit. It was in harmony with the other narratives of conversions in *Acts*. It is questioned only by modern theologians!

Saul of Tarsus, thereafter known as Paul, the apostle, became the evangelist to the Gentiles who wrote various

epistles. In looking back in later years, did Paul ever denounce the place of baptism in the receiving of the grace of God in Christ? He did not. Instead he emphasized it as the time of finalizing our relationship with Christ.

In discussing the covenant of Law and the covenant of grace through faith, he taught that they were no longer children under a custodian of Law “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” The next sentence explains how: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26f). Paul included himself as one being “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3). That change of relationship is not accomplished through faith without baptism.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into the one body, which is the church / *ekklesia* / the saved (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18). One cannot have fellowship with Christ, the source of all spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), without being in his spiritual body which is the church (universal congregation, assembly of the forgiven).

Since baptism is a ritualistic acceptance of the remission of sins provided in Christ’s atonement (Acts 2:38; 22:16), we are forgiven / saved by the same process that creates our relationship in Christ in his saved group.

We were separated from God by our sins (Isa. 59:2). Paul says we are reconciled to God in our relationship in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18f). That reconciliation is in one body (Eph. 2:6) which is the church; hence, the reconciled are his church. The church does not save, but it is the saved, for the same procedure that saves us makes us his saved group. All these considerations identify baptism, not simply believing, as the point of change of relationship. Being thus reconciled to God, we are in fellowship with God and all others whom he has forgiven.

Paul further informs us that “if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This newness of life (new birth; John 3:3-5) is given when one symbolically dies with Christ, is buried with him, and is raised from the dead with him in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). In this rebirth of water and the Spirit one becomes a child of God entering and submitting to the Kingdom of God (See Gal. 3:26f again).

These references from Paul which should be studied in context, of course, were written long after his conversion experience which he himself related in Acts 22 and 26. In them he explains some deeper meanings without altering his story. Do we have reason to change it? For two decades converts had obeyed the gospel sufficiently without his epistles.

Grace Through Faith

About twenty-five years after his conversion he explained: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8f). By that statement was he saying that Ananias really *goofed* and misled him into thinking that he could gain salvation by works when he told him to be baptized to wash away his sins? Certainly not. Paul could know that he was formally accepting Christ’s forgiveness which changed his relationship rather than contributing anything to it. His obedience was no more meritorious than his faith. Neither faith nor baptism contributed anything to the atoning of sins but both are essential to the accepting of the atonement.

Justification is not delivered to us C.O.D.! We pay nothing for it, nor do we have anything of merit to offer. That does not mean, however, that we do not have to answer the postman’s ring or walk to the mailbox. We must accept the gift or it is “returned to the sender.” We may sign a receipt and use

a pocket knife to open the gift. All these actions are necessary to receiving the benefit of the gift but offer nothing whatever toward payment for it. Paul did not class his accepting actions as works adding anything to the completed work of Christ.

All of Paul's explanations about salvation by faith must be interpreted in harmony with his own conversion. Paul taught salvation by faith – a system of faith – rather than by law with its system of works. When he wrote of saving faith, he was referring to faith in its full essence which includes response. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6) is a succinct statement of that. Not through rituals of the Law (code) of Moses, but through Christ's law (principle of action -- love), saving faith includes response. Without the essential element of action, faith is dead, hence, ineffective. The active response of faith is not a work in the sense that Paul says we could have reason to boast.

Single Factors

We can find prooftexts that attribute salvation to various single factors such as faith, repentance, calling on the Lord, confession, baptism, works, and doing the will of the Father. Are we left to choose the factor which appeals to us, fortifying it with prooftexts, while disregarding the others? No, for they are all involved in the system of faith. When a writer emphasizes a single factor, he is using a common linguistic device called a *metonymy*. In the metonymy one part may be used for the whole. For illustration, if you say your life was saved by the quick response of the paramedics, you are including all their remedial activities. Jesus explained that his Golden Rule "is the law and the prophets" in letting a part represent the whole. Also, in the beloved Golden Text of the Bible, John 3:16, when Jesus specified "whoever believes." He was including all the responsive action that is involved in living faith. Surely, he was not referring to dead faith – faith without works (James 2:18-26). Even so, inspired writers may attribute our righteousness to the single or few factors being discussed as in Romans 10. Paul uses this device in answering the jailer's cry, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" with "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," yet Paul then taught them the more inclusive word of the Lord and baptized them the same hour of the night. (Acts 16:30f).

It is a marvel to me that students of the Word will quote Paul in declaring, "Everyone who **calls** upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13) without relating it to Acts 22:16 where Saul was told, "Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, **calling on his name.**" In his epistle in later years Paul is not indicating that he was freed from his guilt on the Damascus road when he called out to the Lord nor at any other time simply by calling out in something akin to "the sinner's prayer." The "calling on his name" is inclusive of his whole conversion process.

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not what I tell you?" Jesus chided (Lk. 6:46). Again, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). To call upon the name of the Lord involves more than crying out to him in prayer.

What, then, does it mean to call on his name? The *name* denotes, not some proper name like *Jesus*, but the *person* or *authority of that person*. To do something *in the name of* a person means to do it *by the authority of or in behalf of*. When Saul was baptized to wash away his sins, he was doing that *by the authority of* the Lord as he was directed to do through Ananias. In this procedure he was not only invoking the authority of Jesus but also the Father, the Son, and the Holy

Spirit. Just before his ascension, "Jesus came and said to them, 'All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to **me**. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

These considerations interpret Paul's "**every one who calls**" in relation to his own account of his conversion directed by Ananias. They are in harmony with Jesus' Great Commission. There is harmony with the conversion of the first converts on Pentecost when Peter told that great gathering, "Whoever **calls** on the name of the Lord shall be saved," and then instructed convicted men, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:21, 38).

Do we not compromise our integrity as interpreters when we dissociate Paul's teaching from his own related conversion experience, the very words of Jesus, and the words of Peter on Pentecost to whom Jesus had given the authoritative keys of the kingdom? So, in view of these considerations, what does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? You are accountable to God for the answer you give sinners.

Holy Spirit

The visible manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as depicted in Acts were not for the purpose of saving individuals or showing how or when salvation is given. Let it be stated again: There is no record of the Holy Spirit filling the saving role or even telling an individual what to do to be saved. Luke was not explaining the full work of the Spirit that Jesus had promised. What, then, was Luke explaining?

Please consider this. The Roman Empire frowned upon new religions among its subjugated provinces while allowing free practice of their traditional national religions. Thus, Judaism was permitted. But here were the *Christians* spreading from the Jews but with the disfavor of the Jews. They were becoming the target of persecution. Luke was writing Theophilus, evidently a Roman official, not so much to convert him to Christ, but to assure him that Christianity was the true Judaism which was no longer just nationalistic but worldwide in its thrust. This was attested by the Holy Spirit being given to Jewish apostles. Then others, like the Samaritans who were sort of *Jewish cousins*, Cornelius who was a Roman, Saul who was to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and converts to the teachings of John the Baptist were attested as being in harmony with the Jewish apostles. Thus the Holy Spirit was demonstrating God's acceptance of individuals of different races and cultures in one body of disciples of Jesus. This would indicate that Christians were the true Israel and that Christianity was the national religion of God's approval through the Spirit. Such status should relieve them of persecution in their spread into the Roman Empire.

All converts since Pentecost had received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism, but only a few received visible manifestations as proof to onlookers. The visible manifestation was given in those five instances mentioned above – to some before baptism in water and to some afterward – to indicate God's inclusion of them in the "all nations" scope of his kingdom. Those visible manifestations were neither the cause or result of their having received the benefit of Christ's atonement.

Purpose of Baptism

What we are setting forth is not *baptismal regeneration*, the receiving of life through a *sacramental* ritual whose powers cleanse the soul. Such a sacramental concept was invented to be performed upon the infant supposedly born in sin. Baptism is a responsive part of faith by which grace is accessed (Rom. 5:1f).

In baptism we symbolically die with Jesus, are buried with him in his tomb, and are raised to new life in him. Paul, included his own conversion experience in expressing this: "Do you not know that **all of us** who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **We** were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we** too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3f).

Paul again includes himself in the consideration that "...he saved us, not because of **deeds done by us in righteousness**, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit**, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be **justified by his grace** and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5f; compare Heb. 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11). He speaks of symbolic cleansing by washing again, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might **sanctify** her, having **cleansed** her by the **washing of water with the word**, etc." (Eph. 5:25f).

Paul's statements above relate well with the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born anew**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:3, 5).

From these passages we see that the **word, water, and Spirit** are involved in the **new birth**. Jesus told the disciples, "It is the **spirit** that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the **words** that I have spoken to you are **spirit and life**" (John 6:63). Peter adds illumination with, "You have been **born anew**, not of perishable **seed** but of imperishable, through the living and abiding **word** of God"... "That **word** is the good news which was preached to you." (1 Peter 1:23, 25).

Since inspired writers use natural birth as a type of the spiritual birth, let us look at the analogy. Life does not begin in the delivery room though it is ineffective without it. Our physical life comes from God through Adam and Eve and succeeding generations. Each individual new life begins with conception, an insemination (seeding). A developing period must be followed by a delivery, without which previous developments are in vain. The birth did not give the life but finalized it in a different relationship.

In similar manner the Spirit gives life through the word believed (seeding, insemination) which develops into active

Polygamy

An American brother who has been evangelizing in a Third World country where polygamy is still a part of their culture wrote me asking, "What do you do about polygamists who come to faith in Christ as polygamists?" He offered some insightful thoughts. As I had never been asked that question directly before, I had to give it some special thought. Let me share my thoughts with you.

Due to parochial inbreeding of traditions and concepts, the first inclination is to outlaw the very thought of one being accepted by Christ who has more than one wife. But that concept may be based more on culture than Scriptural evidence.

faith. Thus faith leads one to be baptized in finalizing the birth process. It is then that sins are remitted and the gift of the Holy Spirit is received. A new life is recognized and a new relationship is established.

Preach Jesus' Words

It is with more dismay than joy that I compose this essay. After sixty years as a teacher of the word, I almost feel apologetic for still writing on such an elementary subject as baptism. Am I just singing the "Elijah blues"? Is everyone in the platoon out of step but me? It is my deep conviction that a truly fresh restudy should be made of this vital subject free from defenses of traditional, sectarian, or popular concepts. Perhaps the greatest good the Stone-Campbell Movement contributed to the American religious scene was its reevaluation of the conversion process, yet some of its fresh concepts became distorted and sectarian within the movement.

I find it inconceivable that present-day evangelists, in advising sinners as to how to accept the pardon Jesus has to offer to every creature, actually refuse to use the words of Jesus or Peter who proclaimed, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved," and "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The fact that evangelists prefer to substitute "just believe, accept Jesus in your heart, just pray the sinner's prayer," and other such terms for the very words of Jesus' Great Commission should be shocking to every believer.

My conscience would never allow me to give assurance to a sinner that his freedom from sin is to be enjoyed without baptism. Baptism still remains as a commanded prerequisite to the remission of sins. There was always an urgency about it in the narratives in Acts. After the finalizing of the new relationship in Christ by baptism, Saul took food and was refreshed, the Philippian jailer and his family rejoiced, and the Ethiopian treasurer went on his way rejoicing.

Are there exceptions? Does God save any unbaptized persons today? God's prerogatives are his own. If he chooses to save a non-believer or an unbaptized person, that is his prerogative. However, I am not authorized to encourage anyone to depend upon his possible exceptions instead of his instructions. Yes, Jesus forgave the thief on the cross, but he died before Jesus commanded baptism. His case was not an exception to the terms of the Great Commission for it had not been announced.

Having written all the above, now let me state that I am not trying to bind my conscience on you. I claim no infallibility. I am not your judge. I respect you according to the depth of your convictions. If you declare that you are a child of God, my only alternative or desire is to regard you as a brother or sister in Christ. I am saying, however, that a critical examination of our birth certificates is in order. []

Some of God's principles may be applied differently in different cultures.

From the beginning of our history in Genesis, it seems that God's intention was that a man have only one wife. Yet in history, we see that God sometimes condoned, or allowed without reproof, men having a plurality of wives and concubines. Where is that law stated that limits a man to one wife? Such a perceived law is derived only from our legalistic logic.

On what grounds would you condemn polygamy? Fornication? Adultery? Try again! Those answers do not fit. Fornication is sexual relations of two unmarried persons. Sexual relations outside of marriage between two people, with one or both being married, is adultery. Neither of those definitions fits

the polygamist, for he is married to the women involved. A man cannot commit adultery with his wife.

If their acceptance of each woman in addition to the first wife is adultery, then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David were all adulterers openly, unashamed, and without censure!

Under the Law of Moses, God provided that, if a man died childless, his brother should accept his wife and bear children for the dead brother (Deut. 25:5; Matt. 22:23-24). It seems strange that no case is made against receiving such a man when he wished to accept the Gospel. And no preacher or writer of New Testament record registers disapproval or rejection of such a person having the two wives. They had no case against such a person! In your deductions you may claim that the repentance demanded at conversion would include the breaking up of polygamous marriages, but that is not a necessary deduction, for it was not a sin in the first place.

Yes, the Scriptures generally assume that a man should have only one wife, just as they assume that every

If the demands of a perceived law violate love, mercy, or justice, then a review of what is thought to be a legal demand is certainly in order. God's laws are intended to uphold the higher principles of love, mercy, and justice. The demand that in conversion a polygamist destroy his family might show respect for perceived law, but it would show utter disregard for the higher principles the law is intended to promote. It would be a sort of backhanded way of doing evil (destroying a family) that good (salvation) may come!

Does this concept being proposed cast undue reflection on the Patriarchs as being immature in concepts about monogamy and slavery? I can only answer that they were not called because of perfection of character.

Am I seeking to license polygamy in our society? No more than I am giving you license to buy a slave or to capture a person for enslavement. You, and our society, I trust, have moved on to the higher principles, but that is still not true in cultures worldwide. []

person has the right to be free. Yet, slavery was condoned and regulated with divine sanction in cultures accustomed to it. Cultures, like individuals, must grow into maturity. Though the mature principles of love, mercy, and justice are intended to guide us socially as individuals, God has been forbearing toward our slowness of development. We trust that to be true in regards to our Christian forefathers in America who owned slaves.

In writing about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul actually uses slavery as a parallel illustration. Slavery was not of God's intention from the beginning but he did not condemn it in cultures later where slavery had come to be accepted. Paul's parallel is fitting because Abraham, the father of the faithful, was both a polygamist and slave holder. One of his wives was a slave-woman!

In his discussion of marriage, Paul instructs, *"Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord assigned him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised, etc.... Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.... So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God"* (7:17-24). There is no New Testament record of a preacher or writer demanding the breakup of a pre-conversion marriage in order for those involved to be acceptable to Christ!

