

FREEDOM'S RING

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

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My “Restoration” Heritage: Good or Bad?

Several years ago I weighed in (in the feather-weight division) as a crusader for redirection of the people of my heritage from extreme legalism to grace. Because of that, it is not unusual for some new reader to inquire out of curiosity if I have left the “Church of Christ,” or the “church of Christ.” Reacting adversely to my efforts, a few have demanded, “Why don’t you leave the Church of Christ – you hate it so?”

No, I have not “left the church.” I am still in the Lord’s universal congregation, however you may wish to designate it. And I serve locally with a group whose heritage is of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

If we are identifying the Church of Christ as the universal church, why should I want to leave it? Since the Lord is the one who added me to his congregation, I am not sure that I would know how to leave it. If we are thinking of the Church of Christ as one of the splinter groups of the Stone-Campbell Movement, then I will want to investigate in order to make any needed changes that will identify it with the one produced through the Gospel. My heritage is in the Church of Christ, however correct or flawed that heritage may be.

It is somewhat like my parental heritage. Even though, especially as a teenager, I thought I could point out flaws in Mom and Dad, I never really wished to exchange them for new parents. Since there are no perfect groups, I choose to work with the problems with which I am familiar rather than to trade them for unfamiliar ones in a different group.

Your garden is not without weeds, yet it can still produce good food. Because you are constantly pulling and hoeing weeds out of it, you are showing concern for the value of it. There is a difference in weeding and destroying, and between reformation and opposition. My efforts of redirection arise out of my recognition of the great things we have left behind which should be restored.

About two hundred years ago, Barton W. Stone and other Presbyterian preachers fell out of favor with their group because they cooperated with Baptist and Methodist preachers in the Cane Ridge Revival, a tremendous camp meeting in Kentucky in 1801. He was promoting unity, but that was not acceptable to his people.

Thomas Campbell came to America in 1807 and began preaching among the Presbyterians in Pennsylvania. When he tried to persuade the factions of the Presbyterians to commune together, he met with disfavor. His son, Alexander, still in Ireland, was also concerned about the disunity of the Presbyterian factions who would not share communion.

Both Stone and the Campbells were proposing “to unite the Christians in all the sects” not by uniting them in a new church, but by accepting one another in spite of the barriers men had devised. That concept being generally unacceptable among the churches, these preachers, still unknown to each other, soon found themselves making converts to Christ outside existing churches. Their efforts developed into two unity movements which ultimately joined forces in 1832. However, it was much later that the term “Restoration Movement” was applied. Those men claimed to be reformers, not restorers of an extinct church. A damaged work of art would need restoration. Only in that sense of correcting misdirection among disciples did they claim to be restorers. “We are Christians only but not the only Christians,” was a motto expressing their ideal.

Having been schooled in the restoration concept, many times I taught lessons on “The Falling Away and Restoration of the Church.” After the true church supposedly had faded from history, we had restored the “one, true church.” We in our particular splinter groups of the Stone-Campbell unity movement were it! We developed an extremely legalistic system of argumentation to prove it. While pleading for unity and “proving” our particular course of unity by the Bible, we continued to divide. Our very message was divisive. We had made a 180-degree turn from the aims of our heritage. The unspoken motto was more like, “We are Christians only and the only Christians.”

Since our heritage in the churches of Christ is so ambiguous and contradictory, which heritage shall we promote and which shall we reject? I have chosen to return to the unity aims of the Stone-Campbell Movement rather than promote the divisive course of the “Restoration Movement.” My heritage is from both conflicting concepts. Finding myself in the latter, I work to redirect us into the former. Ideally, we might wish to do as Stone and his associates did. Having dissolved their newly formed Springfield Presbytery, they aimed to dissolve into the church at large. But the church at large, the universal church, does not exist in any visible, organized form with which we may associate or into which we may be assimilated.

Actually, all who have been saved by Christ have been assimilated by the Lord into his one assembly. With the one universal Church of Christ in mind (not later converts of his who would wear that name), Thomas Campbell declared with true insight, “***The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct.***” His son, Alexander would later observe that, if there are no saved in the sects, then there are no saved on earth. It is vital that those whom he saves by his grace accept others even as they themselves are accepted. When we raise barriers of acceptance, we renounce the wisdom of Christ who made us all one. These concepts are the roots of my heritage.

What does the Stone-Campbell Movement within the church have to commend its existence? It added much Biblical freshness to the religious scene in America. With no claim of scholarly insights, I list here some valuable contributions.

Individual relationship. There was recognition that our relationship is with Christ rather than with an organized system of religion. It is reconciliation to God rather than “joining the right church.”

Priesthood of all believers. No disciple is subject to a hierarchy, nor is his worship and service mediated through a clergy or organized religion.

Simplicity of liturgy. The individual disciple or congregation can offer worship that expresses the feeling of the heart without prescribed formal ritual or specially ordained leadership. Although we have made an indefensible dividing issue of unaccompanied singing, we have demonstrated the rich value of accapella singing in its simple expression involving the congregation rather than professionals.

Individual freedom. The disciple is accountable to God rather than to man, to a system of men, or to superiors in rank.

Individual responsibility. Each person is accountable for his own understanding of the will of God. No church creed may be bound upon him. He is free to choose the group with whom he assembles. He serves by his own initiative with no one dictating what he must do in serving God.

Congregational autonomy and independence. Christianity is not an organized system of religion. It must be noted, however, that much of the “power” of our Movement became its weakness, or stumbling block. Like the power of choice given to Adam and Eve allowed them to choose the wrong path, so our freedom has allowed disciples to separate into dissociating groups. The remedy for this, however, is not in taking away individual and congregational freedom and forcing conformity.

Re-emphasis of baptism. Although, eventually, many of us became too legalistic in our views of baptism, our Movement called attention to the Biblical emphasis, mode, purpose, and meaning of the ritual of baptism as a part of the conversion process.

Distinction of the covenants. Alexander Campbell’s “Sermon on the Law” setting forth the distinction between the old and the new covenant was thought to be radical when he delivered it but it added much to the common understanding of the Christian religion. The same is true of Thomas Campbell’s theological treatise, *Declaration and Address*..

No item above was necessarily a new concept to all Christians and churches. But the freshness of all these combined in a movement appealed to the common man as being Biblical, sensible, and practical.. Great acceptance was given across our new nation. The exciting, fast growing Movement could not be ignored nor could outside forces stop it.

Sadly, however, the movement gradually lost its focus, and internal doctrinal disputes fragmented it. It suffered intensely from the divisive effects of legalism, restorationism, and patternism. Unwritten creeds defined each splinter group. The role of shepherds in the congregations developed into that of authoritarian elders. Worship and service of the individual became funneled through and controlled by the organized congregational system ruled by elders. The means of acceptable worship were narrowly defined to five exercises. The emphasis of a works-oriented righteousness developed into an oppressive system which became more burdensome than supportive.

These charges do not apply to every individual and every congregation. There have always been those who enjoy their freedom in Christ. In too many communities, however, our people have painted their own self-righteous portrait as the only ones with a chance of going to heaven.

Having formerly identified with that image of our movement, with chagrin and grief, I renounce it and seek to identify with the original image of our movement. This is not a matter of my “changing churches” but of changing direction. I can also report with much satisfaction that the number who are taking this course is growing rapidly. Realizing our misdirection, our people are recognizing their treasured heritage and are finding great joy in embracing it again.

There is reason to believe the renewal of our original message will ignite another unity movement in a nation tired of religious division. The phenomenal reception given to the unifying, Christ-centered writings of Max Lucado are undeniable evidence of this. His books remain on the best-seller list in the category of religion year after year. What a shame and tragedy that all those in our movement do not join in proclaiming such a basic message! God has raised up a nationally-recognized and

loved leader in redirection. Thank God, many are on that road with him.

Due to the fallibility and errant tendency of man, local communities of believers will always need reformation and redirection. This point is evident in the apostolic epistles. To resist or oppose any corrective change from the status quo in any generation is to fail to see that most vital message. Those who think to have found all the truth may denounce reformers as *change agents* in a most bigoted manner.

Whether we are considering our heritage or any newly perceived concept, it is most important that we “..test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22). []

HOOK’S POINTS

May grace and mercy be yours. GRACE is what you are given which you do not deserve. MERCY is not being given what you deserve.

This bit from Vic Phares: “The domain; <freedomring.org>, is ranked # 27.650 out of 446,219 domains in the <WebsMostLinked.com.database>. That is in the top ten per cent of that group.

If you like to conjecture, try this question. Think of a Hebrew man in Egypt, as others were sprinkling the blood on their mantels, declaring that he would not participate in such a senseless activity in which he did not believe. However, his wife and children insist so strongly that he consents to do it simply for their sake. Would his firstborn have been spared? Whatever your answer may be, how far could it apply in our lives?

Recently I sent another M-Bag of 96 books to Dr. Prasad in India. 84 of them were my titles and 12 were “*I Permit Not A Woman...To Remain Shackled*” by Robert Rowland donated by him.. Bob and Stan Paher both give out free copies of FIC at the lectureships that they attend. Dr. Prasad still has about 1200 copies of the Telugu version of FIC. He has distributed some of them at Lutheran and Baptist seminaries.

As you visit your kin and friends this summer, give them books. Or send books ahead and discuss them when you visit.

Through your concern and generosity, our working fund remains healthy with about \$4000.00. We are still hoping to put out a Spanish translation of FIC for free distribution this year.

Commenting on the claim that the body in which Jesus was manifested after his resurrection is the one he has in heaven, and that ours will be like his, Greg Rasaka, of Newberg, OR, made a forceful point in a letter to me. The apostle, John, saw Jesus in intimate association after he was risen, but he wrote later, “It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). John is saying that we will be like Jesus, but not like the form he had seen on earth.

Another point: In his risen body Jesus was able to appear and disappear unhindered by normal physical barriers. So if we are given a body like his in our resurrection, we can leave the grave without disturbing the soil. And we may escape the locked bronze casket without opening it!

Right there in Nashville: Leroy Garrett is scheduled to speak three times at Nashville Jubilee in July! I am sure many of you will be eager to meet and hear him there. Many of you have been influenced greatly by his liberating writings. In

years to come you will be glad you saw, met, and heard this prominent reformer and his wife, Ouida.

All God's Children is the title of a well-written, insightful study by Sharon and Ray Steelman concerning women's leadership in the church. Read or download it at <<http://www.freedomring.org/allgods/>>.

Another site with good counseling type material is <<http://gospelthemes.com>>. It is "Tradition Challenging Publications for Independent Bible Students" by Patsy Rae Dawson.

The Falling Away

While clearing out a thick underbrush, I noticed that I had lost my wristwatch. So I searched for a long time for it. Finally, in the very last place I looked, I found it!

Even a listening child would probably respond, "Why would you look further after you found it?"

After we have found "the answer" to a Biblical question, why look further? Too often, I have learned to my dismay that I had "found" the answer in the last place I searched, but I should have searched further! That is true concerning my conclusions about "the falling away" mentioned in the Scriptures.

Many times I have taught lessons on "The Church: The Falling Away and Restoration." I would chart out on the blackboard, indicating the beginning church, the falling away through the development of Catholicism, the Reformation bringing denominationalism, and the "Restoration Movement" in which we presumably restored the original church. Because reformers pointed to the Catholic religion as the apostasy and the pioneers of our movement were so confident of that also, I needed to look no further. Who was I to question the historical answers!

I had two dependable proof-texts. The first: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the **coming of our Lord** Jesus Christ, and by our **gathering together unto him**, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that **the day of Christ** is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that **day** shall not come, except there come a **falling away** first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that as God he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Etc." (2 Thes. 2:1-12 - KJV).

Adding to my "proof" was: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the **latter times some shall depart from the faith**, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their consciences seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:1-3 -KJV).

Since the popes claim to be vicars of Christ, are called "Holy Father," require celibacy of those in holy orders, have restrictive regulations about foods, and have offered signs and wonders supporting their claims, why look further for fulfillment of Paul's predictions? The search stops when you find the answer.

After the Lord's patience with me for decades, however, with some surprise I recognized that Jesus himself had spoken of this falling away. Reluctantly admitting that his explanations were more authoritative than the spin we had put on the subject, I began to see that I should have looked further

in my search. In fact, I should have accepted his word on the subject as the original source of information which was reaffirmed to Paul by the Spirit.

For sake of brevity and emphasis, Jesus' words in Matthew 24 (RSV) will be abridged and highlighted.. "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the **sign of your coming and of the close of the age?** And Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, **I am the Christ (Messiah), and they will lead many astray.** And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but **the end is not yet ...** And then **many will fall away ...** And many false prophets will arise and **lead many astray ...** most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures **to the end will be saved....** And **then the end will come.** For **false Christs (Messiahs) and false prophets** will arise and show great **signs and wonders, so as to lead astray**, if possible, even the elect. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the **sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken**; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will **see the Son of man coming** in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a **loud trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. So also, when you **see** all these things, you **know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**" (Please read v. 1-35 with special attention to the highlighted parts.)

WOW!! How could I have been so blind? All along Jesus has been telling me that the falling away would take place before the generation of his listeners passed away! I had his own word for it but did not comprehend it. I had chosen to listen to the spin of commentators instead of him! Even though I may be blind to his word, it will not pass away or be proven untrue.

What was this "falling away"? It is the *apostasia*, meaning revolt or rebellion, from which we get the word *apostasy*. Look into your more recent translations of the Bible. The word is translated **the rebellion** in the RSV, NIV, and The Living Bible. The TEV has **final rebellion**. The Phillips' Version renders it **a definite rejection of God**. In the NEB it is **the final rebellion against God**.

Long before Paul wrote concerning that falling away or rebellion, Jesus had warned, "They will lead many astray," "Many will fall away," and "false prophets...will lead many astray" .. "so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."

Jesus was asked about "the sign of your coming and of the close of the age." He used terms like, "but the end is not yet," "He who endures to the end," and "then the end will come," accompanied with "a loud trumpet call." Later, Paul referred to it as "the coming of our Lord," "our gathering together unto him," "that day," "the day of Christ," and "the latter (later) times."

At this coming of the Lord in vengeance upon his rebellious people, Israel, their entire system was to fall, being pictured by Jesus in apocalyptic language as the upheaval of heavenly luminaries. Such figurative language of dramatic upheaval was common among Hebrew writers. In predicting overthrow of nations, it was used by Isaiah about Babylon (Ch. 13), Damascus (Ch. 7), Ethiopia (Ch. 18), and Egypt (Ch. 19; Ezek. 32). Joel used such materialistic descriptions (Joel 2:28-32) and Peter quoted them as relevant on Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). We may address this further at another time.

In these happenings they would see the sign of his coming. They would “see” (discern) him in heavenly visage in the clouds according to his promise in the Olivet Discourse quoted above. (Relate these passages also: Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; Acts 1:10-11; Matt. 10:23; 16:27-28; Mark 8:38, 9:1; Luke 9:26-27; 21:12; Rev. 1:7.)

What is the time setting for all these dramatic events? The end of time? The Bible does not indicate that time will ever end, as though that were possible! Is it the dissolution and end of this physical universe? The Bible does not speak of such! Jesus stated plainly when it would happen: **“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till ALL these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”** “Heaven and earth” would pass away at that time, but he was not speaking of the physical universe, but of the then-present system through which God had dealt with Israel. The nationalistic status of Israel, ruled by their luminaries in high places in the political kingdom and their religious system, would reach its end. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus made it clear that this upheaval would occur in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the texts cited above Jesus repeatedly informed his listeners that these things would take place in the life-time of some of them.

Do we have to verify the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions historically, that is, by identifying names, places, and events involved. Absolutely not! We have his word which will not pass away. Shall we trust uninspired historians more than Jesus’ own words?

It is true that Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived at the time, verifies many things by supplying specific names, places, and events, but my trust is in Jesus’ own words rather than the respected historian. Historians can be inaccurate, and we tend to pick and choose from ancient records, accepting that which substantiates our own notions.

The rebellion of the Jews against God was not altogether new, but rather it was climactic and final in that generation. God-defying men displaced the priesthood and took over the temple and instigated revolt against Roman rule at the same time. In that time of terrible upheaval in their nation many Jews abandoned their faith, as did many disciples of Jesus also. The passages under study do not indicate that there was ever to be a total abandonment of the faith by disciples. None of these passages indicate that the church would disappear or be obliterated. The kingdom of the Messiah is eternal and indestructible. It would never need **restoration!** There would always be saved people – those who constitute the church. The church is not an organization that can be traced historically. However, since the church is erring people saved by grace, it will always be in need of **reformation.**

Must we identify those who would forbid marriage and require abstinence from meat? Certainly the Catholic church does not forbid all marriage or command total abstinence from meat. Some of those restrictions were a part of the Law of Moses and also a thorny problem of early Christians. In the first century, the Essenes, as an example, were ascetic, promoting celibacy over marriage and were very restrictive of diet. This is not to say they are the ones Paul referred to necessarily, but it indicates that we do not have to wait hundreds of years to find people who would fit Paul’s description. The Gnostics, or some similar philosophical sect, might be considered. Unless Jesus and Paul were predicting two different “rebellions” or “fallings away” (and there is no evidence to that effect), we will have to take Jesus’ word that this development was in the life-time of some of his listeners.

In passing, here is another note of interest. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus declared: “..then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” That would be experienced by some of that generation. Many years later, John repeats Jesus’ prophecy, saying, “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Rev. 1:7). This destructive visitation upon the Jews (tribes) came upon that generation. This is a clear indication that John wrote *Revelation* before the occurrence of the things Jesus predicted for his generation.

If the falling away/rebellion occurred in the first century as this treatise proposes, how can we defend our claim of being a “restoration of the New Testament church”? If it was not obliterated – a time when there were no saved people on earth – restoration of the church is a mistaken concept. It is usually based upon the concept of an organized system of religion. No group of disciples can trace itself historically to the apostles.

It is difficult to accept that the falling away occurred during the lifetime of Jesus’ listeners. That is not due to lack of clarity of the statements of Jesus and Paul. It is difficult because we have built so many wrong ideas around our traditional misconceptions.

When the gospel is preached, believed, and obeyed, the church is being produced, for the church is the saved people. The Lord does not form an organization but creates a fellowship of those reconciled. It is a “here and now” relationship in any age or nation without dependence upon any historical connection.

In speaking of the kingdom, Jesus stated that “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). In view of that, I once composed this little rhyme which has won me no “Pulley Surprise” for obvious reasons:

Christ’s church is sparkling new,
Yet we’re nineteen centuries old,
Like wheat which this year grew,
And has for years untold.
Though time may kill each crop,
Another fills our need,
Not by perpetual plant,
But by life-giving seed. []

The Pentecost Sermon

The birth of an heir is usually a joyous and exciting occasion. The happiness that it brings, however, may be diminished if the birth was out of great pain and endangerment to the mother.

That is an inadequate illustration introducing the exciting events reported in Acts 2. What an earthshaking development is pictured as the gospel was proclaimed and Christ’s kingdom on earth was inaugurated on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ atonement. It has always been thrilling to review those happenings with listeners. However, there is something foreboding and threatening that overshadowed the joyous occasion..

As years have flown by, some different insights into the Pentecost sermon have enriched its meaning for me. I am honored if you let me share some of them here.

“Salvation is from the Jews,” Jesus told the Samaritan woman (John 4:22). It was they who looked for the Messiah to restore their political/religious kingdom, reestablishing the throne of David. Affirming his primary mission to the Jews, Jesus told the Canaanite woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Earlier, “These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, **‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’**” (Matt. 10:5-7). In harmony with this, the Pentecost sermon was to a truly Jewish audience concerning that kingdom. Peter’s address was particularly to the Jews who had called for Jesus’ death. The gospel was “to the **Jew first** and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

“To them (the apostles) he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and **speaking of the kingdom of God**” (Acts 1:3). Jesus instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them. In anticipation of that, they asked their burning question of expectancy, “Lord, will you at this time **restore the kingdom of Israel?**” They were inquiring about the political/religious kingdom being restored. Jesus did not give a definite answer. He only told them to wait in Jerusalem.

They had to wait only ten days until the Spirit was sent to the amazement of “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.” As a spokesman, Peter began his sermon by quoting Joel 2:28-32, a prophetic and apocalyptic passage so full of meaning: “...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And in the **last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood, **before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.** And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” This prophecy by Joel which Peter quoted certainly gives meaning to the happenings and sermon of Pentecost.

Several exciting developments would identify the “last days.” The Spirit would himself bear witness to the fulfillment of Joel’s words and would choose and endow spokespersons without distinction of nationality, age, or gender. There would be dramatic upheaval described in cataclysmic terms. The day of the Lord, the great and manifest day, would come. Salvation would be given to those who would accept the authority of the Lord. We will observe that two aspects of salvation were offered – salvation from **sin** and from **physical destruction** with the disobedient nation.

Peter’s quoting this message from Joel should have revealed nothing new to his listeners, that is, if they were familiar with Jesus’ Olivet Discourse given less than two months before. Concluding his pronouncement of woes against the scribes and Pharisees, he offers this dire prediction for those last days: “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon **you** may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, **all** this will come upon **this** generation” (Matt. 23:34-36). Then, in deep emotion, he laments, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your

children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.”

Continuing his record, Matthew tells that the disciples asked, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of **your coming** and of the **close of the age?**” Jesus did not speak of an end of this physical universe. His listeners could **endure to the end** that he was talking about. “But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” The gospel began to be preached on Pentecost and went to all nations in their lifetime (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:10; Col. 1:23) before “the end”. Jesus emphasized that all this would be in the lifetime of some of his listeners (Matt. 24:34). In the next chapter (25), Jesus directs three judgment parables to the Jews who would give account at his coming.

All those things happened but the universe was still intact. Rather than this being an end of this material universe, it would be the ending of the covenant with Israel “imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). At the same time the new and different covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (to the Jew first and also to the Greek) was being implemented. The old covenant based on law regulated a political nation ruled by a religious system. The new covenant was personified by Christ himself. Through the offering of himself for all mankind, those who would submit to him would receive forgiveness of all sin, and they would become his spiritual kingdom. They would be ruled by his spiritual law, that is, his principal of loving action, written in their hearts.

The Jews generally, even including the disciples of Jesus, were looking for the restoration of the earthly kingdom with the throne of David reestablished. The Messiah, the anointed one, would be their deliverer from Roman rule. This mistaken concept prevailed even until Pentecost.

Peter dealt with this issue in a forthright manner. He declared that they had killed “by the hand of lawless men” him whom God had sent and attested. He was the very one God raised from death to sit on David’s throne. God had now made him both Lord and Christ (Messiah)! The evidences were overwhelming.

Being cut to the heart, they cried out in desperation, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s answer expressed the good news of the new covenant. By change of heart and submission to the new king implied by their baptism, they would be forgiven of their having rejected God’s son individually and receive the approving presence of the Holy Spirit whom they had seen manifested that day.

Peter’s sermon was not directed to the disciples of John for they had prepared for the approaching kingdom. His specific target was those who had rejected Christ and helped to bring about his death. Neither was Peter calling for repentance from prevalent personal sins like lying, stealing, drunkenness, adultery, hypocrisy, slander, and greed. The repentance he called for was a change of conviction about Jesus. Once they would submit to his spiritual direction, in their maturing process they would deal with all those specific unspiritual activities.

Those who accepted Christ that day were saved from their sins – a spiritual salvation. Yet there was another danger to their lives – the loss of their lives at the time of the physical destruction to be brought on their city and nation coming upon that generation. So Peter exhorted them at length, “**Save yourselves from this crooked generation.**” He was pleading that they not go down with the doomed ship. All of the exciting

changes mentioned by Joel were not completed on Pentecost because the period of about forty years would be the "last days" of Joel's prophecy. **The day of the Lord, the great and manifest day** was the time of the *parousia*, the coming of the Lord which would complete and fulfill all that Joel and Jesus had spoken. []

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

→ Man, I am just blown away by what I have read. Talk about grasping new concepts and slaying sacred cows! How did you come by all this stuff? It just releases me into a new level of God. Brought up a RC, born again in the AOG, traveled through the CRC, Apostolic, Family Life, and now in the Baptist, this has been a very uplifting night of surfing your site. What I thought I knew, I now have to relearn, adjust, and who knows what else. Thank you for sharing what you have. Jesus is Lord indeed. Thank you again. -Mark Liedel <Marju@kisser.net.au>, Australia.

→ Dear Jay (who had sent a book to Nicole), I finally finished reading that book. I am so grateful that you sent me that. I did not realize how bound I was by legalism and what a wonderful feeling has come over me since I read that book! It completely changed the way I look at others and God. Thank you so very much for sending that book. You will never know how much it means to me!! -Nicole.

→ Your April-May edition was great. I loved the poem entitled "*The Calf-Path*." Thanks for the constant mental, spiritual, and heart stimulation of thought. <kevinburt@juno.com>, Memphis.

→ I read your books and can say that I believe in what you are doing. We should be the most joyous people in the world. But somehow we are always trying to find fault with what others are doing. My daughter moved to San Antonio and started going where Max Lucado preaches. She says that when she leaves there she feels like she has truly worshipped God. We went there with her and we felt the same way. Where have you gone where people seem to be rushing to try to get a good seat? And the singing is just beautiful. It does not bother me that some lift up their hands to God while they are singing. But I heard a preacher condemn that very thing. Why do we run everyone else down? -F.L.

→ I would like to receive photos of Jesus so as to stop looking at sex photos. -George. <gkamal@psd.com.eg>, Cairo, Egypt.

→ I will contact Scott about your wonderful offer. He will have to make arrangements with the prison. I sent him several of the *Free In Christ* books and he distributed them at the facility in Torrington Wyoming. Scott is now in Bismark, ND and will be starting inroads for Christ there. It is amazing how hungry some of those men are for the word of God. -Joan

→ I would just like to thank the makers of this site and say that I am thankful for the message of grace they are preaching. In the past couple of months I have been lifted of the burdens of legalism to a certain degree and finally living in the Grace of God. Quite simply, it is wonderful. Thank you for encouraging me. -Mark <xeb@technosushi.com>

→ Keep up the good work. -Richard Danielson <danielr@minot.com>, Minot, ND.

→ We are very happy to receive Dr. J.B.M. Prasad, CoC evangelist, in our Seminary. He freely distributed the books *Free In Christ* to our staff and students about 40 copies which are very useful to the theological students. We pray for

your ministry and your family. -C. L. Johnson, Principal: Baptist Theological Seminary, Kakinada, India.

→ Thank you, my brother, for all your good works and we enjoy all the books that you sent to us. God be with you, my brother. I pray you can come and visit us here in the Philippines. Spend some of your precious time here in our country and share the talents that God gave you with us. Roman Roger Wanasen <rmw-fcss@mozcom.com>, Manila.

→ Hope you are having a good day. Perhaps you can find a place for the enclosed (a donation). I know there must be a lot of expense in your ministry. I always feel joy when *Freedom's Ring* appears in my box. Often, I recall having lunch with you and Lea at your home in New Braunfels. What a delight. Cecil, a number of years ago there was a movie starring Sidney Portier, *To Sir With Love*. The theme song from that movie had the same title. I loved that song. Basically, the message was "How do you say *ThankYou* to someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume?" Or how do you say *ThankYou* to someone who has helped you grow up? Cecil, not just me, but a movement can't find adequate expression for our gratitude. The extent of your influence can not be measured. Thank you, sir. -Gordon Carruth, Mason, TX.

→ Dear friends, we just go on day after day enjoying your letters and forget to thank you. The two of you are doing a great service to all of us CoC folks .. and we thank you ..very much. We praise God that you are better Lea. Carl and Nell, and Leroy and Ouida have long been heroes of ours also. What a blessing for us to have such folks to help us see God's great grace and His plan for us. Also, thank you so much for the Ketcherside treasures that Bob Lewis has made available for us, and for the Lee Wilson site. We have never had the honor of meeting the two of you but feel that we know you. We do love you and wish you both many years of good health. -Dora Bailey <cdbdeb@ipa.net>.

→ I want to thank you for your recent correspondence and help with trying to grasp better the concept of preterism. I am not sure of much of so many things, but I am certain there exists more Biblical truth in preterism than ANY of the dispensational systems I have studied! Dispensational theology (an oxymoron if I ever heard one) is nothing more than end times fairy tales. I praise God for your ministry. Please keep getting the truth out, to the praise of His glory and for the sake of His name! Your health and your ministry remain in my prayers. [I am really enjoying the book *Questions And Answers* by Edward Fudge.] -Jim, MN, <jdosarb@juno.com>

Concerning Unending Torment in Hell

God Doesn't Lie

Curtis Dickinson

If it is true that all human beings who fail to meet God's requirements for salvation are to suffer endless punishment, then it is terribly true to all who are in danger and, in fact, is one of the most important truths that could possibly be known. If it is true, as most churches claim, then it should have been made known in the clearest manner possible from the very beginning. It should have been announced in language which no one could misunderstand, to every generation, and one would expect to read it in no indefinite terms in Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He pronounced a law for their observance, and clearly stated the penalty attached to it. This penalty was to serve as a warning to all humanity that was to follow. Surely, if endless

punishment were to be part of that penalty, justice would demand that it be stated in specific terms. Did He do this?

Here is the clear statement: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17). This is far from saying, "Thou shalt die, and after that, be subjected to the torment of endless hell."

After Adam had sinned, God spoke and said that the serpent was cursed, the ground was cursed, and that Adam would return to the dust from whence he came (Gen. 3:17-19). Nowhere can we find even the slightest hint that Adam was to be sentenced to endless punishment.

The killing of Abel was not only the first murder, but also the most famous murder in all of history. (Gen. 4:1-16). God pronounced the punishment in simple terms, but it did not include endless punishment. Cain then said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear...and it shall come to pass that every one who finds me shall slay me." God's answer was, "Therefore, whosoever slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold." If infinite, endless torment is Cain's punishment, how can *seven-fold more than this be inflicted on anyone else?*

The flood is an example of the worst wickedness found in the Bible (Gen. 6-6). If endless punishment awaits the sinner, surely it would be mentioned here. Details are given: the height of the water above the mountains, the number of days it prevailed, etc. If these people were all to be subjected to endless punishing, what is to be made of the fact that it is not even mentioned?

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do...?" (Gen. 18:17). The destruction of the wicked people is expressed in terms such as *consume, slay, and destroy* (Vs 22-23). They were destroyed by fire, but nothing is said of their being subjected to an endless fire after death. Jude 7 tells us that they are "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Eternal fire and endless fire are two different things. Eternal fire means that the effect of the fire is eternal, just as scripture speaks of eternal salvation and eternal judgment. The fire destroyed them forever, but that fire did not continue to burn. It could not be an example if there was some part of man to suffer endlessly after death, as is taught in most churches today.

What do we find in the Law given through Moses? In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy the commandments are set forth, along with penalties for refusing to obey them, but there is not one syllable to warn them of endless woe to come. In Deuteronomy (Chapter 28) God detailed the curses to fall upon the people for not observing His commandments. Please read them for yourself. These curses were carried out on Israel in 1400 years of history culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Now, if after these judgments of which God had warned were all carried out, can it possibly be supposed that God then casts them into some kind of endless fire, without a note of warning, and without leaving even a word on record of their terrible fate?

Moses had to be well aware of the doctrine of future endless punishment, as it was the common doctrine of Egypt, and "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Yet he rejected it, along with all the other superstitions of the Egyptians. This is strong evidence of the fact that this doctrine is not of God, but of pagan origin. But, if the doctrine were true, and for thousands of years God saw the guilty creatures plunging into unutterable endless torture, after He had clearly stated that their punishment would be death, just

how are we to understand the character of Him who claims to be just, righteous, and true?

The New Testament record also fails to give support for the doctrine. John the Baptist, in denouncing the Pharisees, said that Jesus would "thoroughly cleanse the threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12). Unquenchable does not mean unending. The fire goes out when the chaff is burned up. No unending punishment here.

Jesus warned of being cast into Gehenna. (The KJV uses *hell*, but the word Jesus used is *Gehenna*.) This was the city dump outside Jerusalem, where fire was never put out, and where the maggots fed on dead carcasses. What the worms didn't eat, the fire consumed. No unending punishing here.

In his parables Jesus portrayed the sinner as burned up like weeds, as *cut asunder, destroyed, slain, losing life, scattered as dust*, all in keeping with God's warning to Adam, "Thou shalt surely die," and Ezekiel's statement, "The soul that sins, it shall die" (Ex. 18:20).

The attempt to use Matthew 25:41, 46 to prove perpetual punishment also fails totally. At judgment both the saved and the lost have their fates sealed eternally. The righteous will receive unending life, and the unrighteous will suffer the punishment of death, which will be eternal. It will be the everlasting punishment of death, not everlasting punishing.

After thousands of years of God revealing His message through prophets and through Jesus His Son, with never any warning about unending punishment, suppose that after death people learn that such is the case after all – not death, but unending torture. What would that say of God? It would make Him a liar, for He said that the sinner would die, but instead, He keeps him alive to make him suffer. Such a doctrine makes a mockery of God's justice and portrays Him as a sadistic monster.

Some say, "But God never sends anyone to hell; they send themselves there by refusing to accept Jesus." Indeed, anyone can avoid the sentence of death by repentance toward God, faith in and full trust in Christ, God's Son. But, life depends on the life-giver. No one could spend a day in the alleged hell unless God gave him life. Also, the final word of execution falls from the mouth of Jesus, as portrayed in the parables and in Revelation.

No man on earth, no matter how blinded by some religious creed, would say that it would be just and right to keep a person alive in order that he might suffer endlessly. Certainly man has no right to ascribe to his Father in heaven actions which any human being would shrink from in horror.

No trace of endless punishment is found in the Old Testament. Moses, who did know of it existing among the Egyptians, repudiated it by his silence. The law did not mention it among all its warnings. Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, and the Prophets made no mention of such a horrible thing.

How, then, did the doctrine ever become so widely accepted by Christians, since it is not taught in Scripture? Tertullian is said to be the first Christian leader to teach eternal torture, around 200-220 AD. Augustine was the next writer to champion the doctrine. The Catholic Dictionary says: "So great a punishment, says St. Augustine, that no torment known to us can be compared to it." Augustine was an avid fan of Plato, who is known for his pagan doctrine of an "immortal soul."

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When I first began to declare that the wages of sin is death and not unending torture, an evangelist friend wrote to tell me that if we didn't preach the horrors of endless torment in hell, sinners would never turn to God and be saved. On the contrary, this doctrine hardens the hearts of men and is a barrier to their receiving God's truth and seeking fellowship with Him. For forty years I have received letters from those who testify that, since knowing the true penalty for sin, they have a better understanding of God and the Bible, and greater zeal and joy in serving Him.

The clearest evidence against unending punishment, other than the fact that it isn't taught in Scripture, is that Jesus suffered the penalty of our sin, and the penalty He paid was death, not unending punishment.

"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:23).

(Copied with permission from *The Witness*, (Vol. 40, No. 5) a free publication of Curtis Dickinson. He has written much on this subject which you may order from him at P.O. Box 292663, Lewisville, TX 75029: phone 972-219-2277. Also, Edward Fudge's *The Fire That Consumes* may be ordered from me - CH.)

Some Things I Understand Better Now

Have older folks always seemed to be non-conforming and different to you? Well – cantankerous, stubborn, and uncooperative? Here are a few things I better understand now. You may, too, if you live long enough.

Why the old fellow who can see to read and drive cannot see the long whiskers he misses when shaving.

Why the county fair holds no more appeal to them.

Why they are not impressed with the zealous youth who has just discovered all the great secrets of success and meaningful life which he or she is eager to pass on to them.

Why those in their golden years prefer to stay home at night, and home fare is preferred over eating out.

How they see hope in the innocence and potential in little children which they fear older youth have already lost.

How Grandpa and Granny may express love to each other by pretended grouching instead of sentimental words.

Why they speak more loudly than in former years.

Why they reject the prevalent idea that only new, up-to-date things are of real value.

Why older ones resist manipulation by speakers who use techniques to involve them publicly in interactions.

Why they may be happy for the whole tribe to come for a visit but are relieved when they go home.

Why they take fewer snapshots but recall and relive those treasured snapshots of life in the album of the heart.

Why any program that exceeds an hour is too long.

Why old men are always looking for a rest room.

Why their likely table setting is bowls and big spoons.

Why they have few suggestions to offer for gifts for their birthdays and Christmas.[]].

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