

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> <cecil@freedomring.org> <<http://www.freedomring.org>>

Number 30

July 1998

Lost Email!

Due to a crash of my hard drive in the middle of June, I lost some email. If you wrote about that time, or any other time, expecting a response from me but receiving none, please send your message again. Thanks.

Translation Into Three Languages!

Because it is so exciting to me, I am leading with this report. Opportunities beyond my dreams continue to open. Disciples who are convinced that *Free In Christ* can be of great value among people of their cultural languages are in the process of translating it into three of those languages for free distribution. Neither of the groups has finances for the printing of the books. You may help turn these dreams into realities by your help.

Spanish.

As I have reported before, Robert Acosta is working on translating *Free In Christ* into the Spanish language for free distribution. He has the help of six other persons of the Culver Palms Church of Christ in California where he attends. They hope to finish the translation by the end of September. At that time, Robert states, it will be ready to be posted on the internet and for formatting for printing in book form.

I promised from the beginning to use money from our work fund for the first printing. It will strain our present resource, but I trust you to support this work.

You may contact Robert at <ACOSTA2@aol.com>, (818)-367-7800, 15640 Larkspur St., Sylmar, CA 91432.

Telugu

Dr. Prasad, with the help of others in India, is about finished with the Telugu translation of *Free In Christ* for use among the 16 million in India who speak that language.

Since my last mailout, 318 more books have been sent him, making about 450 in all. He is distributing them to evangelists, trainees, teachers, pastors of other churches, and many doctors with positive and enthusiastic reception. He feels that the Telugu translation will help tremendously among those unskilled in English.

He is working by faith on this project without any money promised for the printing of the book. This seems to be an opportunity we would dream of, and it can be a reality. It

can be changed from dream to reality only with your help in providing resources for printing the book. You are invited to share in this exciting venture. Dr. Prasad has given up his medical practice (except for giving free clinics) in favor of being an evangelist. He travels the different areas evangelizing and confirming disciples, having no vehicle of transportation of his own.

Without a definite bid on the cost of printing, it is thought that the books can be produced for about one dollar each. If you wish, you may contact Dr. Prasad: Dr. J. B. M. Prasad, H. No.11-37 OPP. SBI, Jaggampeta 533435, E. G. Dist. AP, India; telephone 0091-08858-33564

Malayalam.

An evangelist of the Pentecostal Church of God of Joplin, Missouri, an Indian by birth but now an American citizen, contacted me in May. He had come across *Free In Christ* and my other writings on the internet and was thrilled about them. He wrote, "I have not seen such profound thoughts written though I had been in schools and colleges all my life." Then he commented, "I am 100% satisfied with the content. I wish we could give a copy of these books to every Christian in India. I would like to translate these books in Malayalam where 29 million people speak this language. But I cannot bear the expenses by myself. I will share the printing cost if anybody would like to join me in this great ministry."

He returned to India June 4 where he intended to buy a printing press. But the cost is beyond his ability. He thinks he can get books printed at a nominal cost. He has already circulated five copies of each of my five books among leaders there, and they liked the content very much, according to his report.

Another unbelievable opportunity! Who wants to grasp it? The books could be helpful in bringing two segments of believers together in the fertile mission fields of India. The missionary is Samuel K. Thomas, Pentecostal Church of God, P. O. Box 27, Punalur, Kerala, India, Ph. 011-91-475-224943.

I know that the salvation of souls is not dependent upon my books. Sadly, many missionary efforts in all countries nurture much divisive legalism. How good it is, then, to offer correction of course in the earlier stages of church development in this country of eager learners! What a satisfying endeavor for someone, or some ones!

I have never asked you for money and am not starting to do so now, but I am telling you of what I am convinced are

great opportunities. If you wish to have part in these efforts, please let me know. Your prayers will help. Thank you. []

My Conversion Experience

Maybe I was just born to be the “poor soul” character, a sort of Rodney Dangerfield of the spiritual world, for I seem to have missed out on a lot of the euphoria that others claim in their religion. I have never had an exciting conversion experience like so many have claimed. Why has God not confirmed my salvation by some indescribable feeling? Am I still in the clutches of the evil one – I who have been a sort of kindergarten “teacher in Israel”?

There seems to be a common expectation among evangelical religionists of a “conversion experience.” It is almost a legal requirement for acceptance in some circles. Conversion has become not so much an acceptance of Christ through faith that expresses itself in obedience to the gospel as it is a subjective feeling. In my youth, it was referred to as a “better felt than told” experience. With hand over heart (in the chest) persons would declare, “I’d rather have what I feel right here than a whole stack of Bibles!”

Without any youthful rebellion against it, I was brought up in a very strict spiritual environment. Church attendance and participation were a way of life for our family. I never had any inclination toward youthful recklessness and excesses, if I may boast a bit. I did not lie, steal, curse, use vulgar language, make passes at the girls, fight, smoke, drink, or gamble (not even playing “keeps” with marbles). I sincerely wanted to do the right thing and, maybe especially, not do the wrong things.

I am not claiming that I attained perfection, for that is beyond our grasp. I came to realize through Bible teaching that I was at best a sinner unable to save myself. My hope of forgiveness was in Christ. I became aware of the need of repentance from my sins, of confessing faith in Christ as my savior, and of being baptized in accepting the salvation provided by Jesus’ atonement. So I complied with that in all sincerity when I was in my early teens about 65 years ago. I remember the relief I felt in having complied with what I understood to be the will of God. I could feel with the righteous Ethiopian eunuch who, after his baptism into Christ, went on his way rejoicing. Now, was that a “conversion experience?”

If I had believed that some other procedure, like memorizing the books of the Bible, was necessary for forgiveness, I am sure I would have had that same good feeling after having memorized them.

Straight Ahead!

A spiritual conversion is a change involving repentance, a change of life brought by a change of mind. It is like going one direction, making a 180-degree turn, and going in the opposite direction. But I kept going straight ahead! If I made any change, it was more like 360 degrees! The only difference that I recall was that I could then “take communion” and even help pass the trays! Was I converted?

Those affirming feelings of which many testify have come after decision to commit their lives to Christ which often included “praying through,” or in current times, praying “the sinner’s prayer” with no inclusion of baptism. Was I deprived simply because I went ahead with baptism like Jesus taught and the eunuch did? (Mark 16:15f; Acts 8:26-40). If baptism is not a part of the conversion process, I should have had the feeling before baptism when I decided to commit my life to Christ.

Are forgiveness, the new birth, and the reception of the Holy Spirit things to be felt? If so, what sort of feeling is it? How could we be sure? If some inner feeling at the moment one believes in Jesus and decides to entrust his life to him is confirmation of our new birth and salvation, why did it not come to me before my baptism, or after it? Yes, I felt better emotionally after obeying the gospel, but that was because I had apprehensions about my condition that were relieved when I did what I thought I was supposed to do to be forgiven. If I did the wrong thing thinking it was the right thing, my feelings would have been the same. So, emotional feelings are no evidence of pardon. Forgiveness is in the mind of God rather than in my mind. Saving faith must be based upon Biblical evidences, not subjective feelings. Emotions have a subtle way of overruling the word of God and thus becoming authoritative. People of diverse beliefs, whether Methodist, Mormon, or Muslim, have feelings thought to confirm their rightness before God.

If the doctor calls you after extensive tests and tells you that you have inoperable cancer, you will feel devastated. If he calls you back later to explain that records were confused with those of another patient and that you have no sign of cancer, you will feel overjoyed. And the reverse of that is true. If the first report says you are free of cancer, you would be happy. The second report indicating severe malignancy will depress you. Feelings are not dependable indicators of either physical or spiritual health.

When dealing with the spiritual, it becomes easy for us to transfer from belief based on evidence to reliance on subjectivity, depending, I suppose, upon whether we are right-brained or left-brained in our logic and emotion. Satan can deceive through our emotions, so feelings must be in harmony with the written word.

“I can feel the Spirit of God in our midst tonight in this assembly,” we hear someone declare. What does He feel like? Are you sure it is not the mood created by the occasion or some things said or songs sung – the same kind of moods felt in secular or pagan assemblies? The Spirit of God is in the midst of every gathering of disciples for he indwells each of us regardless of the emotional mood of the group. Our bodies are temples of God. The Spirit is in each of us twenty-four hours each and every day whether we feel him or not.

Because of his omnipresence, we can say that God is present in the building even when no one is there, just as he is in the residence we left and in the space between our house and the building. When the first disciple unlocks and enters the building (or any other structure), the Spirit in the indwelled person is in the building also. Is that something that can be sensed? That has nothing to do with excitement or imperceptible influences. We accept that by faith because of evidences based on Biblical teaching. Paul still says that we walk by faith, not by sight (or physical senses).

Concepts of God

I wonder about the concepts of God and the subjective feelings about him that are expressed in some of our songs. Even granting poetic license, I wonder what we really mean when we sing, *Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch Him, etc.*, or, *Jesus, let us come to know You. / Let us see You face to face. / Touch us, hold us, use us, mold us; etc.*

David went to the literal place designated as the meeting place with God, the House of the Lord, the dwelling place of His Presence. When we sing, *Come into His presence with thanksgiving in your heart and give him praise*, or, *I just want to be where you are, etc.*, are we thinking the church

building is the house of God or that the assembly is the meeting place with God? Are not such expressions a reaffirmation of the limited concept that our worship is done in a building in a sanctified assembly where we go to be with God? The truth to be realized is that God dwells in us and with us every moment. Each moment is dedicated to him in whole-life worship and service offered continually. This realization brings us assurance free from dependence upon emotional highs or lows.

Am I denying that God works in our lives or that we might experience any emotion in religion. No. By faith, I give God credit for directing my life and giving me good things, yet I have no definite proof of specific instances. If I could prove it, it would no longer be faith. When I see the things that happen to me as being in harmony with what God teaches in the Scriptures, then I can have that assurance and conviction. "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1) Faith is assurance and conviction based upon evidences rather than knowledge based upon proof.

Is the working of the Lord to be discerned by experience? While garden seed were in good supply, I bought several kinds early, including cucumbers. Weeks later, as I was planting the seed, the cucumber seed were not to be found. I don't know what happened to them. Yesterday, as I was buying groceries, I picked up another package of seed. Back home, while putting the groceries in the pantry, the cucumber seed were not to be found! Nor had I been charged for them. Now, what am I supposed to conclude from that? Is God warning me not to plant cucumbers, or is it a frustration from Satan? If it was just my carelessness, was God or Satan using it to teach me something? Or am I just losing my faculties? Maybe you protest that I am dealing with trivia in which God is not concerned. But if he is not concerned with little things, he is not concerned with big ones for they are made of little ones. If he is not aware of the atom, he is not aware of the world made of them. He sees the sparrow's fall and the fast-falling hairs of my head. Or, more related to my work, my computer crashed. It took three frustrating weeks and three trips to the computer hospital to get it working right again. Was God or Satan behind it? You may think you know the answer, but I don't. I can only leave my life open for the working of God, trust the working of his Spirit within me, and give him credit for the good I discern. All this is to be discerned with understanding rather than the flow of adrenaline.

Gifted speakers, actors, and singers can have a hypnotic effect on people. When such a mesmerizing effect is created in a religious gathering, it is often attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit like when we sing, *Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place; / I can feel His mighty power and His grace*. In secular gatherings where such an atmosphere is created by charismatic performers and speakers, is it also the work of the Holy Spirit? How can we tell if entrancing moods are caused by men or God? You say you have the gift of discernment? How do you know that your claimed gift is not a Satanic deception? Or am I supposed to be too gullible to ask such critical questions?

Emotional Burnout

One of the problems related to the dependence upon emotion is the tendency of burn-out. Desirable activities repeated constantly soon lose their appeal, just like eating your favorite meal of steak and potatoes for dinner each evening year after year. Emotional highs and euphoric worship wear down so that more effort must be put forth to increase the intensity. There must be something more solid and sustaining than feeling. Intellectual conviction based upon understanding of God's message must be the basis of all worship and feeling.

We tend to choose the highest expressions of David's praise as a model for our own praise. In his euphoria he would call for the inanimate components of the universe to sing God's praises. I doubt, however, if he had a thirty-minute session every Sabbath morning for forty years singing those lofty praises. He could hardly have avoided some ritual, dullness, and insensitivity. And I doubt if God had such sessions in mind for him, else he would have included weekly assemblies for worship in the Law of Moses. With God observing those repetitious renditions of the latest copyrighted songs of praise (with fees paid and permission granted), I can imagine him thinking, "That is good, but it is not exactly what I had in mind. I prefer that they be helping other strugglers."

David possibly suffered from bipolar disorder, judging from his high and low moods. Much, if not most, of the world's greatest literature, art, and music has been created by manic-depressive persons. Not only could David ascend to the highest heavens in praise, he could also suffer the depths of depression. His depressed feelings nurtured escapism expressed in his wishing for wings of a bird that he might fly away. Was he less worshipful when he cried out in the depths of despair than when he praised with the loudest voice? Actually, in the long run, according to my observation, depression is easier to live with and closer to reality than the stages of mania or euphoria.

Many of us have taken part in a bare ritual of the Lord's Supper year after year wishing that thoughtfulness would be restored to it. Its rich meaning should stir deep feelings. But if it is made to be emotional, how long can the feeling be renewed week after week? Over a fifty-year period of participation, the feeling must be stirred higher and higher for the effect to be felt.

Already some have branded me as a false teacher. I will give them more cause here. Less frequent participation, like monthly, quarterly, or annually may allow for an impressive stirring of feelings each time without a dulling effect. The only reference to frequency that Jesus made was "as often" as you participate. That was said in the setting of the Passover feast. "As often" as they observed the Passover they recalled their deliverance from Egypt. Now, "as often" as we eat the Supper we recall our deliverance from sin. To argue that annual observance would be insufficient to keep the memory fresh would be to argue that the annual Passover would have been insufficient. I am not defending law or tradition but speaking of avoiding emotional dullness and burnout. If, however, you would gain spiritual benefit from communion "as often" as once each weekday and twice on Sunday, that would be in harmony with its purpose.

In this essay, as is often my case, I have strayed from any discernible outline, throwing in kibbles and bits which you may find neither appetizing, nourishing, or digestible. I trust, however, that you can see my purpose. Our religion should bring joyous feelings of blessedness and assurance. These emotions should be nurtured by realizations of truth. We can be free from the insensitivity of repetitious rituals without leaving reality behind. There should not be a dependence upon manipulated stimulation, nor should those feelings ever become the authoritative proofs of our "saving experience." []

HOOK'S POINTS

It pleases me to learn that you read my material whether online or hard copy. Let me state again, however, that I much prefer that you read my books, especially *Free In Christ*, before you read the *Freedom's Ring* articles in order to understand better the basis of what I write. Many of the

questions that I am asked about the newsletter articles would not arise if the questioner had read my books first. All of my writings are made available to everyone at the web site. There is greater power, however, in the printed page. The five of my books are available to you for the nominal sum of \$24.50 postpaid. Good gifts!

This edition of FR is delayed. I have had some distractions and impediments, one of them being a computer crash which has brought my work to a halt for a matter of weeks. But I have no regular schedule for publication. Email subscriptions have reached almost 1000! It is free for the asking, delivered either by email or in print.

The ninth printing of *Free in Christ* arrived last week. I pay for its printings and recover \$1.00 per book given free. That by no means covers its cost. Prices have doubled and tripled since I began publishing the books, but I have stayed with my nominal original prices.

During May and June I sent out 504 free copies of FIC for you who support this ministry. Our working fund stands at \$2,516.94.

Lately there has been more interest in our roots as indicated by orders for *Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship*, selected writings of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett (\$10) and *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, by Leroy Garrett (\$22). Many of our people are truly surprised and pleased to learn of our heritage.

Mission Messenger, the publication of Carl Ketcherside for 1957 through 1975 is now accessible online in its completeness. Natalie Murrie with Bob Lewis have labored long to put every edition of that cutting-edge publication online for the whole world to read. May God bless them for their persistent work and may he bless thousands who will read Carl's writings. Go to <http://www.unity-in-diversity.org> or <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/people/wketcherside.html>

Also, you may now read eight of Carl's books at our web site. The only books of his that are in print are the two that I reprint, *The Twisted Scriptures* (\$6.00) and *The Death of the Custodian* (\$5.00). (Add \$1.50 for orders under \$25.00).

Literally? *"..that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.."* (Phil. 2:10) Where is that place under the earth where humans exist in fleshly bodies? Or in heaven either?

Your gracious response pushes me to continue. It is so rewarding to reach out to you through *Freedom's Ring* with my groping for truth. Knowing that you are eager also to have your concepts challenged and confirmed emboldens me. I, like so many others, once had the mindset that made me look for all the flaws in the teachings of others. That is proper to an extent. I have tried to change that approach, now looking more for the good and truth being taught, knowing that no one is without flaw.

John York, our pulpit minister for just over a year is leaving this month to teach Bible at David Lipscomb University. A gifted man! Their gain; our loss.

Zealous evangelism. Who are most zealous in evangelistic work? It is those who are most convinced that every person is lost without Christ. Further, sad to state, those who think they are the only ones who are preaching the truth and are on the right course are the more zealous. Without realizing it, they divert from preaching salvation in Christ to include salvation in their segment of the church. Their limiting judgments are made a part of the gospel they preach. So all the narrowed, exclusive, and legalistic divisions are exported

zealously to unsuspecting people of other nations. When a group becomes more accepting, however, it tends to become less evangelistic and expansive.

Weather: My native state of Texas has been having a bad summer. Yesterday it reached 111 degrees in Dallas while it got up to 73 here in Portland. Texans are happy to pay some price for the privilege of living there, and it is only right that there be some compensation for living in Oregon! ☺

SPRINGFIELD, OR is just down the interstate. Close to home. Everybody has put his/her own spin to the tragic school shooting. Suggested simple solutions come from simple minds. But one factor that I do not hear as a cause/solution is compulsory education. We force misfits who can be detected by teachers and counselors at an early age into the mainstream where their frustrations are fed. Their *rights* become a menace to normal children. Their right is to be trained and disciplined in a separate, more rigid system.

Keiko, the whale continues to make the news stories as time is nearing for taking him to Iceland for eventual release. But how long has it been since you have seen news stories of the starving children in third world countries? Millions of dollars and much hype for one whale, but don't mention starving children!

I have to pay for Ted Kaczynski's crimes as the infamous Unabomber. In mailing out books, I have stamped hundreds of packages of books weighing up to five pounds and dropped them in the drop boxes. Because of his abuse of the mails, we are no longer allowed to mail packages over one pound in those drop boxes. The nearest post office is seven miles per round trip in Aloha. At 31 cents per mile, that costs me \$2.17 for each trip with two to five trips weekly. Of course, he costs you also as your taxes pay for his expensive upkeep in maximum security. But his crime pays him. He lived an austere life without conveniences, health insurance, etc. Now he has three meals per day provided with health care and all bills paid for the rest of his life.

In 1927, the 680 acres of land on which the new ACU campus was to be built cost less than an older 3-bedroom frame house in Portland costs now!

The Coming of the Lord, #1

"May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:23).

As a career teacher of God's word, I had to pass over Paul's prayer and numerous other references to the imminent coming of the Lord without explanation, for I had none. Was he praying that their bodies be kept healthy for two thousand years or more? Was he misguided in his prayer? Or, was my traditional concept of Christ's coming misguided? The same event, the coming of the Lord, cannot be imminent at two different times separated by two thousand years. He did not say, "at one of the comings of the Lord," as though there would be two.

Perhaps, the most consistent message we are hearing these days from the various Christian groups is the supposed imminent return of Christ. From my use of *supposed* here, you may rightly discern that this treatise will not promote that concept. For some time, I have wanted to address this subject, but other themes have crowded it out, and I have not had time to really study it. We will look at passages indicating that all the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ have been fulfilled – preterist eschatology, or realized eschatology.

If you have already studied this and have your ideas fixed, just skip this page. If you have been warned about “A. D. 70” theories but have given little attention to them, you may still want to check them out for yourself. This will be more an effort to provoke restudy of the subject than to offer conclusive answers. My aim here is to present thoughts concisely for general reading while also opening the way for more private investigation.

Learning to format sixteen columns of this mailout on this computer has been no little trick for this old dog to learn. I have found that, if I have it all laid out as I want it and then need to insert a sentence, it affects the rest of the layout. Everything shifts. There is temptation to make no changes so as to avoid disturbing the format.

Our thinking is like that. We get doctrinal answers laid out in our minds – even with gaps here and there. Then when we change our belief on a certain point, it affects many related conclusions. So we may be tempted not to disturb our layout rather than to format it again.

I intend to throw out some inconclusive ideas about the coming of the Lord for you to try to insert in your mental programming. Some may be startling, but they are not life-or-death matters. Just work on it for yourself without fear.

The Greek word *parousia* in the texts we will be studying means *coming*, not only *arrival*, but also *presence*. It can refer to a point in time or a duration of presence. So when we read of Jesus’ coming, it may mean *the point of his arrival* or *the duration of his presence*. He returned about A.D. 70 and is still here.

A Chosen Nation

The Old Testament history deals primarily with the people chosen by God through whom the Messiah would come. God dealt with them nationally. Many individuals accepted Christ, but as a nation they rejected Jesus and his spiritual kingdom. God no longer deals with nations but individuals. Because of their national rejection, a special dissolution of their system would come in the lifetime of many of those who heard Jesus teach. It would happen about forty years after his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This period would be the *last days*, the end of the age (sometimes erroneously translated *the end of the world*), a time of judgment, the great and terrible day of the Lord, the end of the Jewish system, and the confirmation of the spiritual kingdom. All the many passages indicating the imminent coming of the Lord or day of the Lord were fulfilled in this period of time. We will now identify some of these numerous references briefly for your further study.

Let’s begin with the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was a prophet of doom who cried out against the deplorable moral and spiritual state of Israel. He warned that the Lord would come in judgment, lamenting, “*But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears?*” (3:2; 3:5; 4:1). This does not describe his coming by birth, which was a coming in peace.

Malachi also says, “*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord*” (4:5). This connects John the Baptist with “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17; 1:76f). John heralded not only the coming Savior but also the coming Judge whose judgment was impending (Matt. 3:12), not hundreds of years in the future.

When John declared that “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:2), he was not saying that the Messiah was about to appear for Jesus preached the same thing later (4:17), and so

did the apostles (10:7). They pointed to something even beyond Jesus’ birth and Pentecost, as we shall observe, but it would come upon that generation rather than in the distant future (Matt. 12:38-45; compare Luke 11:16, 24-36).

Jesus called for personal repentance of those present lest they perish, not just spiritually, in the coming judgment on the nation (Luke 13:1-9). The parable of the barren fig tree warned of national doom of an unrepentant nation (Luke 13:6-9). The end of the age, the last days of the Jewish system, is depicted in the parables of the tares and the dragnet at the coming of the Lord in judgment against them (Matt. 13:36-47). This involved those present, for Jesus himself sowed the good seed in his preaching, and some of those rejected would plead that they had eaten and drunk in his presence as he taught in their streets.

John the Baptist predicted an impending judgment so near that the axe was lying at the root of the tree. The catastrophic great and dreadful day of the Lord was to follow the coming of the second Elijah. It would be a time of individual judgment with the separation of the righteous and wicked and also the end of Judaism at the coming of the kingdom which was at hand.

The coming of the Son of man, the *parousia* would definitely be in the lifetime of the apostles (Matt. 10:23). Likewise, some of the disciples would be living when he would come in his glory with his angels to render judgment to individuals according to their works (Matt. 16:27-28; Mark 8:38; 9:1; Luke 9:26-27). It does not indicate that *all*, or even *many*, of his listeners would live until that time, but that *some* would. That keeps it in the range of events occurring about A.D. 70.

In the parable of the importunate widow, Jesus indicates that the coming of the Son of man was to be certain and speedy (Luke 18:1-8). The righteous would be avenged speedily, for it would be the “*day of vengeance*” (Luke 21:22). The reward of the disciples would be in the coming age at the *parousia* (Matt. 19:27-30; Mark 10:18-31; Luke 17:28-30).

The parable of the pounds is very significant (Luke 19:11-27). He gave this parable while on the way to Jerusalem for the final Passover before his crucifixion. He seemed more concerned about the impending destruction of the nation than for his own approaching death. Along with this parable was his lamentation over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21; Mark 11), the parable of the wicked husbandman (Matt. 21; Mark 12; Luke 20), the parable of the marriage of the king’s son (Matt. 22), the woes pronounced upon “that generation” (Matt. 23:29-36), another lamentation for the city (Matt. 23:37-38), and the extended prophecy on the Mount of Olives. These all relate to the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of Judaism, and the dissolution of national Israel as the chosen people of God. It has been my practice through the years to try to milk present-day applications from these parables, but they were given for that generation of “the last days” of Israel.

Forsaken and Desolate

Upon that generation would come the righteous blood of all of the innocent from Abel to Zechariah. Later, they would cry out to Pilate concerning Jesus, “His blood be upon us and our children.” So, in his sorrowful lament over Jerusalem, Jesus declared concerning the house of Israel, “Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate” (Matt. 23:38).

The parable/allegory of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19f) adds more meaning to this. Israel had fared sumptuously on God’s special favor throughout their history. They relied on being the children of Abraham instead of living

rightly individually. They disdained Gentiles, those far off and strangers to the covenant, the beggars for spiritual crumbs. But Jesus indicated a dramatic reversal in that the believing Gentile would be in Abraham's bosom while the rejecting Jew would be separated, far off, rejected, and beyond hope of reclamation. (For more, see Chapter 32 of *Free To Change*.)

Those parables and prophecies were about things to happen to that generation, not to people hundreds of years later. The people thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. The parable of the pounds gives corrective illustration they could understand. It was like a man who was to be king but his kingly office was not yet recognized. He made a journey to the emperor to receive the authority, instructing his servants, "Occupy till I come." He receives confirmation of authority, returns, consummates his reign, and then deals judgment and vengeance on the rebellious citizens. So Jesus came to be king but did not immediately fill that capacity. He went to the far country, leaving his servants to "occupy till I come," and having his authority assured by the Father, returned for the confirmation of his kingdom and to render vengeance on the rejecting nation of the Jews. Some who heard him would live to see that kingdom come with power and the King's destructive judgment against Israel as was verified by history.

Matthew 24 is devoted to Jesus' prophecy given on the Mount of Olives. Most interpreters present it as a mixture of prophecies concerning the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of the world, the universal judgment, and the final dissolution of all things. They intermingle things thought to be immediate with those thought to be distant future, things that related to Jerusalem and the world at large, to Israel and the human race. Some give double meanings to certain prophetic statements. Many assume that the disciples asked Jesus questions about three different events with "*When shall these things be?*" referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and "*What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?*" pointing to the end of the world. However, the word translated *world* here means *a period of time, age, or epoch*. *The end of the age* referred to the end of the Jewish age or dispensation which was drawing close. The entire chapter deals with it. So do the *judgment parables* of Chapter 25. Parallel accounts are given in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Space here will not allow a commentary on these words of Jesus, but we will note that Jesus did state clearly, "*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place*" (v. 34).

The coming of the Lord (*parousia*), that great and terrible day, was to be a time of judgment described in the three parables of Matthew 25. Only two days after giving those parables, Jesus assured the High Priest who judged him, "*But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). The High Priest did not have to wait for centuries to see that coming in judgment.

The marvelous thing about the penitent thief on the cross was his expectancy of Jesus' soon coming in his kingdom (Luke 23:42) even when the disciples were not comprehending it.

"And Now Is"

Jesus, as reported by John, unsettles our format by relating the resurrection with his soon coming at the last day. He declared, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live*" (John 5:25). Consider these other similar statements. "*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up*

at the last day" (John 6:39-40; also 44). "*I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" (John 11:24-27. Note in vs. 27, "*he who is coming into the world.*"). Then Jesus adds the judgment to that setting, "*The word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day*" (12:48).

These promises were made to the listeners personally rather than to indefinite people in the distant future. "*And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*" (14:3). "*I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also*" 14:18-19). "*I go away, and I will come to you*" (14:28). "*A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me*" (16:16; also 22). Again, these promises were made to those present. Jesus intimated that the apostle John might live until his return (21:22).

For those addressed, to live until the *parousia* would exempt them from death. Paul revealed this mystery, "*We shall not all sleep (in death), but we shall all be changed..*" (1 Cor. 15:51). Paul included himself with that group (we) and with Thessalonian disciples as "*we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord..*" (1 Thes. 4:15).

We shall stop here for this time. No doubt, many red flags have popped up in your mind and the format of your understanding has not been revised yet. However, the thoughts I have presented may cause you to consider study for other than pre-formatted answers. I hope to add other passed-over references from Acts and the epistles at another time. Again, I am not giving you conclusive answers for I don't have them, but I want you to study for yourself.

The things covered above are bits I have scanned from the first 140 pages of *The Parousia*, by James Stuart Russell, written and published in Scotland in 1878. This 561-page book is thorough and surprisingly easy to read. It may be ordered from Kingdom Counsel, 122 Seaward Avenue, Bradford, PA 16701 for \$17.00 postpaid.

John Bray has just published a 43 page booklet (\$2.00), *The Rapture of Christians*, giving challenging explanations of the judgment and resurrection pointed to in the texts above as having already occurred at the coming of Christ, or the day of the Lord. His views shift the entire mental format without being destructive of faith. Out of curiosity, or to acquaint yourself with preterist eschatology, you may want to order a copy: John Bray Ministry, Inc., P.O. Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804. His 293-page *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, (\$15.00), which some of you already have, is excellent also.

These sources can supply you with a list of much more available material about fulfilled prophecies. []

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

Your writings (I've read all your books) have opened our eyes and made us hungry to study God's word more and more. What a God we serve! He is awesome!! It is thrilling to have the personal relationship with Him we have missed all these years! We're having a worshipful life in Jesus! <Rstacy1965@aol.com>

I love your site! We just recently returned from "Jubilee", it being our first time to attend. What a great time of learning new ideas, and freedom of worship. Unfortunately, we had to return to the real world, and our real COC environment. It was a real downer, and it's hard not to look around while we sing and think to yourself, "Are these people even making a

connection here?" It's hard to feel the presence of God sometimes in such a stifled, boring, predictable, emotionless gathering. I found one of your articles very helpful –"What to do when you outgrow your church." Thanks a lot. -signed

It is such a joy to find someone expressing what my husband and I have thought and felt for years. I have only recently heard of you. Ironically, it was through a newsletter by a "Pharisaic" congregation in Spring, Texas which was using a quote from you in a negative way. When they mentioned you had a website, I immediately looked you up. I have ordered several of your books and can't wait to receive them. Until then, I'm reading parts of them on this website and I'm thankful for your ministry. -signed.

I would like to make known that I, for one, took offense at some of the items which you stated about the churches of Christ. First of all, members of the churches of Christ are far from condemning others or keeping the mindset that "we are the only ones going to heaven." That couldn't be further from the truth. Churches of Christ are non-denominational, and its members would much rather be called Christians than placed into a group left to be misinterpreted by others. The whole purpose of the reformation/restoration was indeed to return to scripture to show the way to eternal life with Christ and God our Father. I find it hard to swallow that you can say such things against anyone, let alone fellow Christians who have turned to the sole authority we have in order to live a life pleasing to God. -Jeremy Payne, <jeremy.m.payne@vanderbilt.edu>

I heard about this resource from a "care full" brother and I'm glad. I'm fairly new with the C of C so I've not encountered so much of the severe legalism I know is out there. The sad fact is that it's nearly as strong in the other denominations. The most (only) important thing is to bring glory to God wherever we find ourselves. I pray that this resource continues and grows in many forms. -Randy Sellers <RE.Sellers@Netva.com>

I just want to say "thank you" for all you have done for me these last three years. You have faithfully sent Freedom's Ring knowing that I am unable to support your ministry because I am in prison. But yet I am free! Thanks to God and His using you and your teaching to cause us to use our minds and hearts to truly "search the scriptures." I want you to know the truth and freedom I have learned from your teaching has not been wasted or hoarded up, but has been passed on to other searching souls as God has allowed me to influence others. What a terrible sad state it is when our view of God is so distorted that we see Him sitting around with a check list just waiting for us to make enough mistakes so He can send us to hell. Especially when we can truly see the awesome, magnificent, and yet painfully fearsome price He paid so we could be with Him forever. How much sadder a state is it when we take that same twisted view and apply it in judging each other. Thank you brother, may our Lord continue to use you to teach us so we can teach others too. -Jim McIlroy, Fort Worth, TX. [Jim will be released soon. In his dedication of his remaining days to God, he sincerely wishes to serve preaching the word. Can you help him?]

Hello, I am a theology student at the Catholic Seminary in Barcelona in Spain. I studied in Austin, Texas, engineering, an MBA and a Bachelor in Biblical Studies at the Institute of Christian Studies. I am committed to the cause of Christian unity (I feel called to it) and I believe that the Churches of Christ have a tremendous role to play in this cause. I am very impressed by the work that you have done providing all the information on the Restoration Movement and the Churches of Christ. I am considering doing research on this material to make it known here in Spain, especially among the ecumenical circles. <jms@scs.ictnet.es>

I have read several of your books with great interest but with some exasperation. You state so eloquently so many things that I have been thinking and arguments that I have been developing that I routinely slam it shut and shout to my wife, "This man has written my book." You have done such an excellent job of it that I am glad for both of us. Your associate was very kind to give me several copies of *Free In Christ* at the Tulsa Workshop. I have been carefully rationing them out to people that I judge to be wise enough to see through traditions and flimsy "proof passages" that they can read with Biblical understanding. Our minister has already started preaching from parts of it. -Elyria, OH.

I am very discouraged by reading some of your articles. While it is very healthy to raise questions, it is quite another to teach things that are contrary to the Bible. The only thing that you have accomplished here is soothing the aches of many dissatisfied people, instead of "speaking the truth in love". As a result, sir, you have dealt the church for which Christ died a serious blow. It saddens me when people become more educated and lose all of their common sense. As a future graduate of FHU, I sincerely hope that I, and all other college graduates do not fall into the same trap that you seem to have fallen into. "Behold the pattern"! -Byron Lewis <c699054@showme.missouri.edu>

I look forward to reading your messages. There are a lot of us Christians out here who believe in the teachings of the C C and who would love to be back in the church. But the legalism and also the lack of teaching on grace has made it impossible for us to stay. We are saved by grace through faith and not of works that no one can boast. Jesus did it all. Marjory Mawhir <Mmawhir@mci.com>

I enjoyed your chapter on "Is there merit in pain." I think followers of Christ adopted the "give till it hurts" philosophy from pagan religions. It is obviously ignorance (some-times willful) of what the Scripture teaches. Thanks for being so bold. -Curtis Lanclos <clanclos@atlantateleport.com>

Cecil, I really enjoy your web-site. The articles are thought-provoking and challenging to say the least. Having been raised in the "non-institutional" sect of the Churches of Christ, it has taken me quite some time to finally realize that our focus (in many cases) was so far removed from the simplicity of being a true disciple. It amazes me that I once "majored" in "minors" for so long while ignoring the things that really matter. It's refreshing to see the changes that are beginning to take place amongst the Churches of Christ, even within the non-institutional sect. Thank you. -Dennis Billingsley <KatKirkB1@aol.com.>

I read *Free In Christ* several years ago and it was right in line with the thoughts that I and my family had always had. Since then I have taught the Sunday morning class at the congregation that I attend and (amazingly?!) have been allowed to express those same views with no censure. I hope the Lord continues to bless you both in the ministry that He has seen fit to give you. -Todd Rowland <Splatterball@worldnet.att.net>

Dear Pastor: I spent 30 years as a Seventh-Day Adventist. I was taught by my parents to believe that everything that they were taught and were teaching our family was the Gospel truth. I, like the apostle Paul, was far beyond the people of my own age group in respects to doctrinal study and proclamation of these heretical beliefs and teachings. Sadly, I left a lot of torn and tattered relationships due to my belief that the SDA doctrines were "The Only Way" to get to God. No amount of arguing would have ever changed me. Even though I had logged several thousands of hours in personal Bible study, I was "always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the

truth (Jesus Christ)". The Lord chose a unique way to reach me with the truth of the Scriptures. He had a lady challenge me to put away all my denominational books and just read the New Testament through with only the aid of the Holy Spirit, for a period of six months. She said, "If the message you come to understand from the Scriptures is different from the one that you have been taught all your life, you will have to make a decision whether to remain with your doctrinal stance or follow the leading of the Holy Spirit." Within one month I was a changed man. Within two months, you couldn't have put me back in my "box". At the end of the six months period, I was finally saved through "grace alone!" (Eph. 2:8-9). - Martin D. Young <preacher1@mindspring.com>

Should have known a hip guy like you would have his own website. You probably don't remember but in 88 we visited you and your wife on the way to the Texas coast. I recently reread your books as my husband is involved in the International Church of Christ and have found the books to be a breath of fresh air. He is having a little harder time with the freedom. But I did want to thank you for all the insight. -Candace Johnson <series98@earthlink.net>

The articles I have read so far, I think are very good. They are thought-provoking and enlightening. I especially like the article on divorce and remarriage. Our traditional thinking on this subject has just been wrong. -Tom Bilbrey <thbilbrey@nctc.com>

What Do You Mean, "Faith Only?"

Edward Fudge

A Christian Church brother writes, chiding, "I see you saying that you believe in salvation by faith alone, which is an improvement over the Roman doctrine of salvation by works, but is not satisfactory to Bible students who hold to the obvious meaning of Acts 2:38. If Peter is right in what he clearly said on

Pentecost, you are wrong. (I teach that we are saved by faith and not by works, but not by faith alone.)

Good brother, we can't have it both ways. We are either saved by trusting or we are saved by trying. Either Jesus did it all, or we do some of it. We either bring something to God, in exchange for which we hope to receive his favor, or we come to him with empty hands trusting his promise that he loves us and forgives us in Jesus and for Jesus' sake.

Do I believe in salvation by faith "only"? It all depends on what you mean by that expression. If you mean that sinners must DO something to make salvation a reality, but only one thing, and that is to accept intellectually as true what the Bible says, then that is not saving faith and I do not believe in that kind of "faith only."

If you mean that all we can do to enjoy salvation is to trust God for it, based on what he did for us in Jesus – since we cannot do anything to bridge the gap between God and sinful humans ourselves – I agree with that and insist that it is what Jesus teaches throughout the Gospel of John and what Paul teaches throughout Romans and Galatians.

The ONLY way we are saved is by trusting God's love and his finished work in Jesus, not by CONTRIBUTING something to our own salvation, or by EARNING it, or by DESERVING it by anything we do. If that is what you mean by "faith only," it is the gospel and I affirm it with all my heart.

If you mean that one who exercises saving faith can possibly sit and do nothing in the face of God's understood commands and will, or that mere profession of faith is the same as faith itself, or that claiming to be a believer makes one such, then, with the epistle-writer James, I emphatically deny that THAT kind of "faith" is saving faith, and insist that while we are saved by faith (rightly understood) alone, the faith that saves never remains alone. (Reprinted by permission from gracEmail, a free, weekday, e-mail ministry of Edward Fudge, available on request to <Edwfudge@aol.com>.)