

FREEDOM'S RING

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

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Heroes Of Faith or Of Works?

After thirteen years of handling tons of the books, I finally saw it right there on the cover! The Liberty Bell, that is. Do you see anything different about the bell on the masthead above?

In preparation for publishing *Free In Christ*, a graphic artist gave me several suggestions for the cover art. The Liberty Bell was my choice. It was only a few months ago, however, that I saw a discrepancy in it. This is beside the inscription being on the bell instead of the rim. Dr. Prasad in India made a sort of letterhead to advertise our publishing ministry there. On it, he had slanted the bell in the position seen above. On the thousands of books, it is slanted the opposite direction. In a huge bell like that, the clapper does not move to ring the bell, but the bell moves on a spindle to contact the clapper. So it would never be in the position shown on all five of my books!

I assume that my erroneous depiction of the bell will affect the eternal destiny of no one. But this illustrates how unquestioning and comfortable we can become with things which may give a wrong slant or outright misrepresentation.

Hebrews 11 has always been a favorite portion of the Scriptures for me. It is thrilling to read of those heroes of faith pictured there. Only a few years ago, however, I was chagrined to realize that through the years I had held up the heroes of faith as heroes of works instead. That is much more serious than the slant of a bell on a book cover!

In teaching about those men presented to us as examples of faith, I always felt the need to quickly emphasize their obedience lest someone might think they were righteous because of faith! I knew those worthies of the past could not be saved by dead faith, and I thought that most everybody else believed they could!

I wonder now, however, just how many people really believe they can be saved by an inactive faith. Most all who tell the sinner to "just believe" go on to advise them to pray "the sinner's prayer," to call on the Lord, to invite the Lord into their hearts, to commit their lives to God, or some other such expression of active faith. Even though they may leave baptism out because they think it would be an effort to do works of salvation, they still require some active work of faith.

In the first sentences of Hebrews 11, it is declared, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **For by it the men of old received divine approval.**" Yes, those men and women were heroes of faith.

Abel was already righteous before he offered his sacrifice by faith. God bore witness of his righteousness by accepting his gift. He was not a sinner made righteous by his offering a legally specified sacrifice in a legally specified

manner. God accepted him and his sacrifice because he was righteous already. God rejected Cain and his offering, not because it was the wrong thing but because he was already an evil person (1 John 3:11-12). Abel's faith brought forth the response of worship but the emphasis in the story is his faith rather than his worship.

Although no action is accredited to Enoch, "...before he was taken up he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him."

"By faith Noah, ... took heed and constructed an ark ... and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith (11:7) By faith, or works? He achieved his righteousness by following the exact instructions given for building the ark. Right? That is the "works righteousness" that I always concluded with. How misdirected I was! "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8) before the command to build an ark was given. The faith through which he had found favor led him to do what God told him.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called..." (Heb. 11:8-12). From that start it was easy to review the tests that Abraham's faith survived, finally reaching its zenith when he offered Isaac. There and then God declared, "Now I know you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12). Wasn't that when he was accounted righteous and became pleasing in God's sight? Does not James tell us, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?" (James 2:21)?

If we could interview James and ask him, "James, do you mean that Abraham was still an unjustified sinner through all those years since God called him until he set about to offer Isaac?", we could expect him to respond in this manner, "Oh my! No! No! Abraham was continuing to act on his original justifying faith. Faith is not completed in a point in time. It had to be a continuing thing. Faith should be a growing thing. The essence of faith involves more than mental acceptance of some facts. 'You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works' (2:22). Don't you understand that faith must be active or it is dead?"

There are at least four distinctions of works:

1. Works of law. "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from **works of law**" (Rom. 3:28). Salvation by doing works of the law would not be justification by faith.

2. Works of merit. "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has **something to boast about, but not before God**" (4:2). "...it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:9). If we could do works that would merit God's grace, then we could boast of works, and it would no longer be grace, a gift, but something we earned.

3. Evidence of living faith. "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so **faith apart from works is dead**" (James

2:26). Works are an evidence of living faith. If dead faith is effective, the demons are justified.

4. Completing works. James identifies the fourth as the active element of faith: *"You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works."*

Faith must be sustained. It is not something like a birth that is experienced once for all time, but it is more like life which must be maintained at all times. Faith bringing continued justification is always conditional, *"...if you hold it fast – unless you believed in vain"* (1 Cor. 15:2). Paul and Barnabas went about *"...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith..."* (Acts 14:22). It can be renounced (1 Tim. 5:8). We may all yearn as the apostles did for Jesus to *"Increase our faith."* (Luke 17:5).

The faith that God accounts for righteousness is not itself correctness with God. None can claim correctness (Rom. 3:9-18). We can only be sinners accounted or reckoned as justified through his free gift (Rom. 5:15-17; all of Ch. 3). Because we cannot do justifying works ourselves, we are totally dependent on grace. Justification is a gift.

Since dead faith avails nothing, active faith is essential. Breathing is not usually defined as life, but because life is sustained by it, it actually becomes a part of the essence of life. When we speak of a living person, we know that it is a breathing person. In similar manner, works cannot be defined as faith, but because living faith cannot be sustained without works, activity becomes a part of the essence of faith. When the Scriptures speak of a faithful person, we know that believer is active. With that understanding it is appropriate to say a person is justified only by faith for we are speaking of the full essence of faith. Evidently, James was referring to faith in its full essence when he spoke of the necessary activity of faith.

Works do not produce faith, but living conviction initiates activity. My endeavor should have always been to produce faith, like Hebrews 11 illustrates. That is what the evangelists did as recorded in Acts. When conviction was sufficient, appropriate action followed. That is the emphasis of Hebrews 11.

It must be observed that the heroes of faith had neither sufficient faith nor works to produce a flawless character. They were not justified by personal perfection. None could develop the ultimate perfection of character or obedience. If either, or both, of those qualities were necessary for right standing before God, they would have been hopeless. Our prospect is no better. Our right standing before God is a gift – not an achievement, by grace – not by our perfect faith or obedience.

In view of the inspiring examples of those heroes of faith, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb. 12:1-2). []

The Coming Of The Lord #2

When someone introduces a different slant on what we have formerly accepted, our first impulse is to brand it with some denigrating name and counter it with a few familiar proof-texts. However, that only deals with the issue superficially and prejudicially regardless of whether our assumption is true or false.

When we began reading more recently that the prophecies relating to Israel and the coming of the Lord were all fulfilled in the first century, that was the sort of knee-jerk reaction to it. The matter was called the *A.D 70 theories* and was dismissed quickly by a few proof-texts upholding traditional concepts without giving any sufficient harmonizing explanations of the many references to the imminent return of Christ.

In our last issue, I noted numerous references from Malachi and the Gospels to the soon return of the Lord to be fulfilled in the lifetime of some of Jesus' listeners. Now we will extend our look through Acts and the Epistles. We will note that terms and expressions like *day of the Lord, coming (parousia – either arrival or continuing presence) of the Lord, the great and terrible day, the day approaching, the day of his coming, the day of his appearing (his being revealed, the revelation / apocalypse), coming in the clouds, end of the world-age, last days, last time, last hour, end of all things, day of vengeance, coming in his glory, and coming in his kingdom* all spoke of something seemingly imminent and within the lifetime of many of those addressed.

These things are being offered here to challenge restudy rather than to propose all the answers. Let us restudy non-defensively, realizing that this is not a life-or-death issue.

Further confirming Jesus' promise to come to his disciples, two men present as Jesus ascended assured them, *"This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you saw him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11).

On Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel's prophecy worded in the cataclysmic style of the Hebrew writers, and declared that the present happenings were fulfilling the prophecies of the last days and the coming of the day of the Lord (2:17-21). He concluded his discourse with the exhortation to *"Save yourselves from this crooked generation"* (v. 40) in order that they be spared when Jesus came in vengeance upon the nation. Again, this judgment is connected with the *parousia*. Later, Paul would declare, *"He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed..."* (17:31).

The coming and vengeance is mentioned again in Paul's first epistle. Those early converts were *"...to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"* (1 Thes. 1:9-10). For those who had killed Jesus, *"God's wrath has come upon them at last!"* (2:14-16). *"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?"* (3:19). To disciples living then, Paul's desire was *"...that he may establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints"* (3:11-13).

In perhaps the most widely used passage of Paul concerning the *parousia*, he consistently includes himself (we, not they) with those addressed in all the events to occur (4:13-17). He identifies himself with *"we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord"* and *"we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord."* Continuing his remarks in Chapter 5, he told them the Lord will come as a thief but that the day should not take them by surprise because of their watchfulness. Are they still watching?! Then he gives his benediction for them: *"May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it"* (5:23-24).

To the Thessalonians who were already suffering persecutions and afflictions arising from the disturbing times, Paul encourages his current readers, "...since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel ... To this end we always pray for you..." (2 Thes. 1:5-12). Continuing in Chapter 2, he assured them that the current distresses were not evidence that Jesus had already come but that further developments of "the mystery of lawlessness" already at work but still restrained would bring a falling away of many, even as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24, and the revealing of the "man of sin." Paul was writing to current disciples personally, not to us living hundreds of years later.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were enriched "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). Are they still waiting? Their work would be tested, "for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done" (3:10-15). Some would be rewarded while the work of others would be lost without the loss of their own salvation.

In further reference to that time of judgment, Paul urges, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things that are now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God" and "...that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (4:5; 5:5).

The End of the Ages Has Come

The immediacy of these things is emphasized: "I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none... For the form of this world is passing away." Also, "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come." (7:29-31; 10:11). The end of the ages had come upon those addressed. In the communion they were to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:26).

The association Paul makes of the coming and the resurrection deserves much explanation which I am not prepared to give, but we shall only note that connection here. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" 15:22-24). Still including himself with the Corinthian disciples whom he addressed, he declared, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (15:51-52). Though the ancients and some disciples who had died were "asleep," Paul said that all of those addressed would not, but that instead they ("we") would be changed instantly in their transition.

In his personal autograph of the letter, he shouts, "Our Lord, come!" (*maranatha*) (16:22). That would have had little meaning to them if it was referring to something in the dimly distant future.

In 2 Corinthians he continues including himself with the disciples addressed: "that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus" and "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us

with you into his presence" (1:14; 4:14). "Though our outer nature is wasting away..." applied to him and those addressed (4:16). He wrote of what awaited *if*, not *when*, their present earthly tent were destroyed. God would not leave them naked but would clothe them with immortality prepared for the accompanying judgment (5:1-10).

In Galatians we see only an indirect allusion to the subject: "...who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age..." (1:4).

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul makes use of some of the terminology that we are making note of, such as "But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Etc. (2:6-16). He encouraged disciples with, "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (13:11-12). Also, "...the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16:20).

The Colossians were assured, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (3:4), and "On account of these the wrath of God is coming" (4:6)

The Ephesians "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (1:13-14) and "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30). Paul spoke of their present age and the one which was to come (1:21; 2:7).

Paul is more specific in the Philippian epistle. He assured them, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" .. "so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (1:6, 10). He adds, "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (3:20-21). Paul included himself with those addressed, and reminded them, "The Lord is at hand" (4:5).

Much in the first epistle to Timothy relates to the *parousia* though it is more involved, like this prediction of an apostasy, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits, etc." (4:1f). "I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this will be made manifest at the proper time..." (6:14) is another assurance of the immediacy of his coming in their lifetime.

In 2 Timothy are references to that Day looming before them. "...he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (1:12), "...may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day..." (1:18), and "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day..." (Read 4:1-8). Timothy was forewarned of the stressful times of the last days that were approaching (3:1-9).

To Titus, Paul wrote encouraging those then "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (2:13).

The Day Approaching

As the Day was approaching, Hebrew disciples were already being tested by persecutions. An unidentified writer wrote a letter, or treatise, to them to confirm their faith and further convince unbelieving Jews because the great change

was at hand. The spiritual kingdom inaugurated about forty years earlier on Pentecost would be fully confirmed by the destruction of the Jewish system. That which was established at the shaking of Sinai would be supplanted in another shaking by a spiritual kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12). We will list here some of the terms used.

1:1-2 - *in these last days, ..through whom he created the worlds (ages).*

2:5 - *the world (age) to come.*

3:14 - *if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.*

6:11 - *the full assurance of hope until the end.*

9:26 - *he has appeared once for all at the end of the age.*

Please look at this passage for richer meanings. *"But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (v. 26-28).*

10:25, 37 - *encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. .. For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry.*

12:18-29 speaks of the nearness of final consummation.

13:14 - *we seek the city which is to come.*

From the doomed city of Jerusalem, James writes to the scattered Jews concerning the *parousia*. Note the following references.

5:1, 3 - *miseries that are coming upon you ... for the last days.*

5:7 - *be patient until the coming of the Lord.*

5:8 - *the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

5:9 - *behold, the Judge is standing at the doors.*

These references speak of the immediacy of the coming in judgment of the Lord for those addressed then. Peter, in his two epistles, also writes to the dispersed disciples who were already suffering from the tumults of the time. Employing the Hebrew literary style, he writes using their cataclysmic literal descriptions of the overthrow and change of religious, social, and national systems. We shall list some of his references.

1 Peter 1:5 - *for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

1:7 - *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*

1:13 - *the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

4:5 - *who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

4:7 - *The end of all things is at hand; keep sober and sane, etc.*

4:12-13 - *..rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

4:17-19 - *..the time has come for judgment to begin.*

5:1 - *..a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.*

5:4 - *And when the chief Shepherd is manifested.*

5:10 - *And after you have suffered a little while.*

2 Peter 3:3-4 - *..scoffers will come in the last days...where is the promise of his coming?*

3:7, 10f - *being kept until the day of judgment and destruction ...the day of the Lord will come like a thief... waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.*

3:14 - *...since you wait for these...*

The Last Hour

John adds his assurances, *"And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides*

forever. Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:17-18). "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at this coming" (2:28). "...we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (3:2).

To the seven churches of Asia, John related a message given to him by the Spirit. It was *"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his servants what must soon take place. ... for the time is near" (Rev, 1:1, 3). "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" (1:7)* It would be in the lifetime of those who put him to death and in retribution for their deed. The *parousia* would be a judgment against the evils in the seven churches of Asia. If it referred to things hundreds of years in the future, it would have been meaningless to them for those churches are not in existence. *"I will come to you soon..", "...hold fast what you have, until I come", and "I will come like a thief.."* (2:16, 25; 3:4).

22:6 - *..what must soon take place.*

22:7 - *..And behold, I am coming soon.*

22:12 - *Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.*

22:20 - *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

Here I have scanned references in the epistles regarding the immediacy of the return of Christ as set forth by James Stuart Russell in his book, *The Parousia*, I have not interrelated these references as he has in his book published in 1878. To order the book for further study, check details in the article in the last issue.

Even if we say that some of the many references in these two articles refer to other comings, we have to admit in all honesty that most of them definitely and unquestionably speak of the imminence, immediacy, and expectancy of his coming in the generation of both the writers and those addressed.

Were Jesus and the writers deceived, or deceiving? Were Jesus' plans thwarted by some circumstance? If so, can we believe anything else he taught and promised us? Where did he tell of a delay of two millennia or more in fulfilling his plans?

What, other than our pride, can be lost by a restudy of these matters? If you already have satisfactory answers, then skip this class! So far, I have offered few opinions but have tried to state what others have taught about the preterist views of prophecy. If the Lord wills, in the next installment, I will touch on some of the explanations that have been offered relating to the coming of the Lord, his administering judgment, and the resurrection all involved with the last days culminating in A.D. 70. I will still leave things open-ended for you to reach your own conclusions. []

Hook's Points

You are a unique circle of readers who greatly enrich my life. While you are certainly not wavering and gullible, you allow me to continue to challenge traditional concepts, puncture fanciful balloons, and throw out open-ended questions. These cause no alarm for most of you but you accept them like vitamins to stimulate growth. When someone else begins to explain to you what I am "really teaching," you recognize that they are doubting your ability to discern for yourself and are trying to manipulate you to their viewpoint. They are free to do

that. You have as much ability to reach proper conclusions as the next person, so if I can challenge restudy, whether you agree with my vague or changing views or not, you will be more confirmed in your convictions.

After a person has been taught, trained, devoted to, and a teacher of a viewpoint of religion, only a real hunger can bring effective change. That hunger must be strong enough to create a real appetite for truth formerly disliked and to eat generous portions of humble pie. A supply of wet towels should be on hand with which to continue cleaning arrogance from the face

Malayalam translation: Samuel K. Thomas, the missionary in India of the Pentecostal Church of God who asked for permission to translate *Free In Christ* into their language, has written this good news: "By faith I have translated the first book, *Free In Christ*, believing God that He will enable me to print it. It will cost about 50 cents per copy. I would like to get at least ten thousand copies printed. I was just finding out the possibility whether you could help at least part of it. Please do not misunderstand me. I want to promote your books here in India since these are the very best books I have ever read. I wanted to buy a printing press but I am still waiting for the funds to purchase it. I know that in His time everything will work out perfectly. Thank you so much for your prayers and love for us as we struggle to reach as many as we can in this heathen nation. Please do not worry about sending me any money for the printing of the books. God will help us. We love you so much. Let us wait upon the Lord for His blessings." What a wonderful spirit! God may want to help – through you!

Some money has been sent toward publishing the Telugu translation of *Free In Christ*, but not enough to get started with. The work of translating should be completed in a few weeks.

OK. So you bought a ticket for the 295-million dollar Powerball jackpot. You were giving God a chance to give you the money, weren't you? Were you depending upon God to become unethical in letting people believe the lottery was honest while he was throwing it in your favor? ☺

Bob and Joye Rowland have moved from Newport near here to Corona, California to be near their daughter, Cynthia McClure. Though Cynthia has had some respite in her fight against cancer, she is by no means clear yet. Continue your prayers for her. Bob took a carton of 100 copies of FIC to distribute and I kept a carton of 50 of his "*I Permit Not A Woman*." He will miss seeing the lighthouse from his study window. I will miss his drop-in visits.

A native evangelist in Malawi (not of COC) requested books several months ago. I sent an assortment. Now he is requesting 2,000 books! The package of 19 FIC that I mailed today is a bit short of his dream!

Let Me Tell You Of The Pretty Girl....

Riding In The Front Seat

So that was the Holladay girl of whom a would-be matchmaker was quick to apprise me. I can see her now as she and her mother walked to seats near the front in the little frame building of the South Park Church of Christ in Beaumont, Texas. Both she and her mother were of such simple beauty and pleasing countenance as to catch the eye of all. I would need no matchmaker to point her out!

Was I interested? Cool it. Don't get excited! Two mountainous barriers separated her and me. First, she gave me no notice for she was already dating a handsome young executive of the telephone company where she was payroll

clerk. Second, I was devastatingly timid. My painful lack of social confidence and my immaturity in developing relationships had made a 25-year old bachelor of me. "Faint heart ne'er won fair lady."

After graduating from Abilene Christian College in 1941, I taught school one year, began preaching around Portales, New Mexico and at Sundown, Texas, and returned for the spring semester of college in 1944. The semester completed, I had immediate plans to go northwest to Utah with a group, but one unexpected telephone call spun me to the opposite direction to Beaumont to become an assistant preacher.

Serving a different congregation there was another bachelor with whom I began to associate. We commiserated but gave each other little confidence. After a few months, however, it became evident that the Holladay girl and her fiancée had broken up. My friend and I decided to make a daring move. We double-dated – he with Elma Lea Holladay and I with another girl. We went in my 1938 Ford. It was fun! Let's do it again!

After the next midweek service, I approached Elma Lea and explained, "Luryl and I want you to double-date with us again Friday evening, -- but this time I want you to ride in the front seat." She giggled, and agreed. Yes, you are ahead of my story. She has been riding in the front seat ever since that date fifty-four years ago! More than a year later, on October 8, 1945, that seating arrangement became permanent, by the grace of God.

No, it was not love at first sight for either of us, but as we began dating, our common interests and somewhat similar upbringing made us comfortable with being together. She, too, grew up under the hardships of the Great Depression. Elma, her mother, was from the Big Thicket of southeast Texas of a strong heritage in the Church of Christ which she instilled in her only child. Her father, Watt, from Alabama, was a good and loving man who had made no commitment to religion. Having only minimal education, they gave Elma Lea no encouragement to go to college. She remembers a happy childhood growing up in the oil field town of Daisetta, 35 miles from Beaumont and 50 miles from Houston. In high school she was sought out by the popular boys. Finishing high school, she moved to a job in Beaumont, and soon her father found a job in the old Spindletop oil field, and the family was reunited in Beaumont.

In our developing relationship while dating, I began to feel her strengths filling areas of my weakness. She was outgoing and confident, a leader by nature, and socially mature without sophistication to stifle her spontaneity and buoyancy of spirit. These qualities, along with her communicative skills and expressive affection for others, were lacking in me. In her personality I began to feel a complementing of my person. Maybe love has a selfish aspect, for we are drawn to the person who compensates for our inadequacies.

It was fun being with a girl of such exuberant happiness. Even though many of our dates were to my preaching appointments, that was fine with her for she loved going to services. In fact, she liked preachers, having dated preachers before. We never went to a movie during our year of courtship!

My lack of social confidence was so deep that I think I could never have come to love a woman who was not attractive. This girl had beauty to spare. When she entered a room, everyone noticed! She received the special deference that people unconsciously give to those with physical charm. And she thrived on it! This twenty year-old, slim and shapely girl entering my life was 5' 5", had high cheeks with wide-set blue

eyes and light brown hair. Whether they were untouched or crimson, her thin lips were tantalizing. The pleasantness of her countenance was enhanced by a fair and flawless complexion which radiated when she conversed with animation – a special glow which, unfortunately, was never photogenic. Clothing of delicate pastels of beige, peach, or pink accented her complexion and femininity. When she looked at a person individually and smiled, her love and acceptance were felt, and her transparency made her easily approachable. Her unaffected beauty even without makeup was striking, and in her “Sunday best” it was exquisite. Sometimes she wore a flower, such as a red hibiscus, in her hair. At other times her hair was pulled closely around a “rat” so that the pure features of her face were highlighted. Often she wore broad-brimmed hats which accented her classic profile. Some said she looked like Greer Garson, a movie star of that time. As you would expect, the attention given her boosted my self-esteem. Too, I could see that her delightful beauty emerged from inward spirituality and intelligence.

After several dates, we were returning to her home from one of my appointments. Impulsively, feeling that the time was propitious, swerving to the curb and stopping the car, I reached around her to pull her close, and gave her our first kiss. But in that motion, I toppled her broad-brimmed hat off into the back of the car! She giggled, but that should have been an omen to her forewarning of my lifelong inclination for bumbling romantic gestures. The kiss was memorable, and she continued riding in the front seat!

Although Elma Lea was not quite as prudish and rigid as I was, she was clean and wholesome. We both detested profane and vulgar speech. In fun she could be impishly flirtatious and would sometimes respond in coquettish “baby talk” which, to me at least, was most charming.

As the several months passed, I grew to love her deeply. Her acceptance of me was a bit more cautious. I could appreciate her wanting to be sure. To this day, however, she has had no way of comprehending the change she was making in my life. As I felt her growing love for me, a sense of indescribable peace calmed my being. I suppose it was like the peace that passes understanding of which Paul wrote. Though there were the urgent fleshly passions, they became secondary to the sense of loving and being loved. All seemed right in my world with her in the front seat.

Because of conscience, neither of us would allow ourselves to violate the sexual sanctity that belongs to marriage. More than that, we counted it as part of the delightful romance of love to be wholly fulfilled with each other as a holy bond. Premarital expression would have destroyed an essential part of the true love story by allowing sexual urges to rule over love.

Soon after our marriage we began our thirteen-year stay in South Louisiana. There the young bride truly became “the preacher’s wife.” Then, and thereafter, she rode in the front seat with me, not just as a passenger. We shared the driving. Throughout our years we worked as a pair and shared decision making.

Church activity became our life. She soon found her place teaching classes on Sunday and Wednesday evening, and then the ladies’ Bible class. She has made countless calls with me in homes and hospitals. She has organized and led activities and has been involved in countless showers. She has prepared and helped serve enough food to feed the troops. Most visiting preachers stayed in our home. Elma Lea liked this role except when people began to expect her to perform duties because she was the preacher’s wife. She resented those who would take advantage of her in that respect.

Leading with her heart, she was sometimes hurt by less thoughtful people. Criticisms, which come inevitably, cut her deeply. I think she has always felt the stings inflicted on me more than I did. While sitting through forty years of my lackluster pulpit efforts, she has always been my kindest critic. Even in my most glaring displays of stupidity, she has always been gracious and forbearing.

Some of you may be surprised at my referring to her as *Elma Lea*. She received the *Elma* from her mother but never really liked the name. About twenty years ago, after her mother had come to live with us, two *Elmas* in one house seemed to be too many! So she asked everyone just to call her *Lea*. Surprisingly, all friends and family, and even her mother in her eighties, dropped the first name immediately.

Although Lea had done little cooking when we married, she learned from her mother whose country cooking was unexcelled. Soon, however, Lea could give her competition in cooking Southern, country, and Cajun kinds of dishes. We always shared housework even as we shared in church work. From our first days together until now, I have prepared breakfast each morning. Because she has liked to sleep later, she has not always indicated that I was doing her a big favor in awakening her for breakfast!

I have admired her for her spotless housekeeping and for always being fresh and clean in body and dress. Though she had to operate frugally, she always managed to keep the house tastefully decorated and to choose clothing that accented her beauty. Even with no formal training, her artistic creativity was evident in color coordination, flower arranging, china painting, and free-hand sketching, but her delightful femininity excluded all things inventive, mechanical, and athletic.

In the singing in our smaller congregations, Lea’s rich voice could be distinguished in the crowd. The song leaders leaned on her to help start and carry on the singing. She sang at funerals and weddings. On trips with our children we enjoyed long sessions of singing as we traveled.

After a few years together, we made the big decision to start our family. But it was not that simple. Years passed with no prospect. When we had about given up hope after five years, on our first vacation to the Rockies, Lea seemed to have caught a virus – one which lasted a full, miserable nine months. But as she held Sol Watson for the first time, all the misery was forgotten.

Plans for another child went even worse. Years passed and hope died, but in the tenth year after Sol’s birth, after a full term of unrelieved misery, Mira Lea turned it all into joy.

How blessed our children have been to have Lea for a mother. They received her full devotion. She was the ever-present communicator and nurturer developing confidence and responsibility in them in a happy, loving home. She is rewarded in seeing their exemplary lives and beautiful families.

See what I mean about my bumbling efforts to be romantic! I intended this to be a romantic tribute to Lea but have made it an analysis in retrospect! Her forbearance with my less emotional nature has not been without my appreciation all along. While her right-brain and my left-brain temperaments have generally complemented each other, there have been inevitable gaps allowing for insensitivity. I know I have allowed routine of life to dull our journey together at times. Probably many, many more times than I have realized, my selfish or insensitive words or lack of emotional support have grieved her. Yes, we have spoken harshly to one another at times. In those instances we deprived ourselves of happy moments, but at no time did we doubt our love for one another. There were no

wrecks, but only bumps and potholes, on our road of marriage. At all times I was happy that she was riding in the front seat with me. There would have been no happiness for me otherwise.

One of the distresses felt in our marriage was the frugality bound on her by my minimal income. In church life, most of our associates had much better incomes than we, and that put a limitation on full social participation with them. We were never in want, but it would have been nice for me to have been able to treat Lea to a few luxuries like freedom to eat out and to buy new clothes, and less limited trips to the hairdressers and department stores. Literally, she was able to ride in the front seat in only one new car, a 1947 Plymouth.

Except for the few years that Lea served as a church secretary, she was the true homemaker, as the children and I liked for her to be. I count it as a singular blessing that most every day of our married life I ate three meals with her and was at home at bedtime each night. In that role she was truly my partner. Although she never prepared a sermon or wrote an essay for me, I give her equal credit for whatever good or ill may accrue from those I formulated. I am honored that her name is joined with mine on the title page of the many thousands of books we have published.

Like Paul learning to accept his "thorn in the flesh," Lea has dealt with persistent headaches with patience and stamina. Then, while Mira was still an infant, a truly disturbing and enduring problem intruded. Like some diabolical power intent on suspending both mental and physical function, periods of depression would render her listless, introverted, and disconnected. Doctors knew little about bi-polar disorder then and had practically nothing with which to treat it. Acquaintances offered ill-advised opinions. Longer periods of relative relief have allowed more stability of mood in spite of the ever-present lurking of inexplicable, abrupt bi-polar mood swings. Depression affects the organic functions of the body. Consequently, she has suffered from various other disorders which has demanded constant supervision of doctors. With admirable courage and determination, she has kept her sweet, loving spirit, has learned to bear patiently with pain while still reaching for the joys of family and friends, and has continued in worthwhile activities.

The relentless encroachment of time has taken its toll from both of us. The sensuous embrace has given way to our clinging to each other to steady our faltering walk as we go about. Yet that is an affirmation of love, and no touch from her hand goes unnoticed. Lea is now very weak and feeble. It pains me to see her difficulty with such simple things as in buttoning a blouse with her arthritic, trembling fingers or as holding a spoon steadily enough to eat with it. But beneath this overlay of the bodily effects of time and disease, I can still see the shapely, energetic, and buoyant love of my life riding in the front seat at the various milestones of life.

On the farm in my youth, we had a pair of mules – Ol' Pete and Ol' Kate. They were a team, working together. Kate was more spirited, and resisted being bridled. But Pete was compliant. As you bridled and began harnessing him, Kate would come and stand beside him waiting to be harnessed also. After working long hours together and being turned out to pasture, they would graze side by side. Then they would stand contentedly side by side facing in opposite directions dreamily fanning the flies from each other.

That sort of pictures our married life, with us now being in the latter mode! (Now, is that romantic – or what! See what I mean?)

Thank you for listening. I wanted you to know more about this pretty girl who has changed and filled my life. Has my

depiction been more idyllic than real? Have facts been distorted and embellished by nostalgic enhancement and tricks of memory? Be that as it may. The marvel is that my memories are of a life of happiness and fulfillment enabled by Lea's lasting love rather than of bitterness and regrets over incompatibility, jealousy, heartaches, and rejections.

Other than for Lea's health problems, our life in retirement has been peaceful, happy, and rewarding. With enduring love we try to enjoy each fleeting day. If the Lord wills, on October 8 we shall have been married fifty-three years and on November 22 Lea will be 75, and two days later I will reach fourscore.

Although we are not eager to leave this life, the imminent transition holds little fear for us. Without morbidity we are opting for the simplicity of cremation with our cremains being buried with the least of ceremony close to others of my family at Rochester, Texas.

When we put off this mortal vestiture, we shall be clothed with immortality which I think will be immediate. Flesh and blood do not inherit the world of the spirit. Not much is told us about heavenly relationships except that there will be no marriage. Will we recognize each other without fleshly identification? Will we still love each other? Will we remember our life on earth? I cannot know, but I can trust.

When you cross over, look me up. There beside me, I think you will find that pretty girl still riding in the front seat! []

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

(I intended to include some longer positive responses to "My Conversion Experience," but crowded them out. Maybe next time.)

God bless your ministry! We were both raised in the church of Christ and attended Abilene Christian College in the 50's. We have had questions for many years concerning the legalistic views of the church, but we never mentioned them to fellow members because it was controversial. That's why it is so refreshing to read your books and find other people of like mind. -signed. Houston, TX

I was referred to your book, *Free In Christ*, by a couple in Brady, Texas a couple of years ago. It was indeed an enlightening experience, and covered many of the questions I had harbored within for years. I am a member of Westover Hills Church of Christ in Austin. I am so glad I was led to the Web site by my sister who has been attending Robinson Church of Christ near Waco. Keep on keeping on. Sharon Plemons <rplemon@flash.net>

Thank you for your insight in this article (Conversion Experience). You express the same feelings and realizations I have come to as well. It is good to be confirmed by an honest soldier of Christ such as you. -signed

I have read your material in the past, but just now feel compelled to write to say thank you for your courage. I feel that God is using you to change a "paradigm" in the Restoration churches.

I was raised in the a *capella* church, but, being a sensitive sort, I couldn't bear the constant attacks against others with different interpretations of Scripture. Having said that, let me say that I'm not antinomian – I moved into the Independent Christian Churches.

Through the relative openness of thought in the Christian Church, I have really examined my faith over the years. After working 20 years in chemical research, in 1992 my wife, Cheryl, and I began our present work as missionaries in Chile. We are planting a church, establishing a national ministry to families, and working toward a Christian higher education project, which will be the first in Chile, if God wills.

My heart aches when I continue to read some of the earlier exclusivist attitudes of the churches of Christ, but on the

other hand, I have seen marvelous changes. On our last "mini-furlough" I was actually allowed to speak in two a *capella* congregations in North Texas. It was really enjoyable. Please keep up your work as long as God gives you strength. -signed.

Thank you for sending *Freedom's Ring* to me all these years. I always eagerly wait for the next issue to arrive. It's a wonder to me how you do it. I thank God how he has worked through you. You have been blessed with a gift of communication and teaching. Your last newsletter was so encouraging to me – *My Conversion Experience* and *The Coming of the Lord*. Great! Thanks! -Clair Pecinovsky, Cresco, IA.

salvation anyway!). Should I copy the "Creed" chapter of your book and let them read it...should I simply never turn the questionnaire back in? Should I write that I will only "teach the Bible" across the front? Any advice you can give to my husband and myself will be much appreciated!

We have been very encouraged to find such writing. Some of those ideas I have had for years, but did not have the words. Thanks. -signed. Missoula, MT.

I am reading your book, *Free In Christ*, for the second time. I read it first when I was worshipping with the Brookline Church of Christ in Boston some fifteen years ago. It has been even more refreshing this second reading. -Dwayne Simmons <dsimmons@cid.wustl.edu>

Last week you sent me your book "Free in Christ." I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading it. It was like you wrote it just for me and my husband! I was raised in the church, attended OCC and pretty much accepted whatever people told me to believe. Then we moved to California, and it was like a different planet! It was the first time I had encountered Christians in the Church of Christ who weren't just like me! Over the years, I have read and studied and have come to the conclusion that the Church of Christ teachings aren't totally correct. However, I have stuck with this "sect" because it is the closest thing I have found to the example the Bible has given us.

Yesterday, my husband and I "placed membership" with a church near our home. We had to have an interview with the elders, and at the end we were given a questionnaire similar to the one which you referred to in your book. I have never seen such a thing in all of the churches we have ever attended. I am an excellent teacher and was looking forward to working with this church, but it's clear to me that if I answer their questions honestly, they will never let me near a class! Things such as:

- Do I believe a woman can pray in the presence of men. (yes)
- Do I believe that instruments in worship is wrong? (no)
- Do I believe that the world was created in 6- 24 hour days? (who knows?)
- Do I believe in the 1000 year reign? (again, who knows, and why should I worry?)
- Do I believe that the COC is a denomination? (an emphatic "yes"!)
- Do I drink (occasionally, at special occasions), smoke (no), swear (I try not to!), dance (I only wish!), or use drugs (NO)
- When and where was I baptized, have I been married before, etc. etc. etc.
- What Christian publications do I read? How much do I study the Bible?

(Interestingly, they didn't ask about my prayer life or about my relationship to the Lord...) I'm not sure what I should do at this point. I don't want to be labeled, or brought to the elders to defend my beliefs (which have nothing to do with my