

FREEDOM'S RING

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

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Number 32

September 1998

Measuring Ourselves As We Measure Others

In 1943 while G. C. Brewer was serving the Broadway church in its old downtown location in Lubbock, Texas, I bought a little book from him. The book by J. N. Rayzor was *A History of the Denton County Baptist Association* copyrighted in 1936. Denton County is north of Dallas. I suspect that we in the Church of Christ might have bought as many of the books as the Baptists did.

Our interest centered on page 87 – just one paragraph which went as follows: "An incident in the Pilot Point church during Rev. J. B. Cole's pastorate, which involved a point of doctrine subjected Pastor Cole to criticism, and gave the incident much publicity and notoriety. Pastor Cole went fishing one day with a business man who was not a Christian, and he availed himself of the opportunity to talk to the lost man about his unsaved condition, and led him to an acceptance of Christ. Jo Ives, the man converted, said to Pastor Cole, "Here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized?" Obviously Brother Cole thought of the story of Philip and the eunuch, and, taking that incident as an example, he led Mr. Ives out into the water and baptized him. Rev. Cole had been a Baptist but a short time and was not up on their conception of baptism, and how and when it should be administered. The news of the incident soon spread among the members, and then the show began. The following Sunday Mr. Ives presented himself to the church, asking membership, and his application was rejected and he was hurt at the action of the church and turned to another church, which readily accepted his baptism. The criticism of the pastor caused him to ask a committee of eminent brethren to sit in judgment upon his conduct – Drs. A. J. Holt, J. B. Link, and R. C. Buckner. After reviewing the details of the incident they wrote the church advising it to drop the matter, and Pastor Cole to go his way, but not to repeat the act."

That candid historian supplied good ammunition for our people to fire at the Baptists! So we bought his book to use against them. I do not recall, however, seeing a great migration of those good people into the Church of Christ as a result of it. And I doubt if we really endeared ourselves to them in the process.

Having said all that, I still applaud Pastor Cole and have to rule in his favor for following such a Scriptural precedent. We in the Churches of Christ would never refuse to accept into our congregation a person who was baptized into Christ, would we? For Baptists to require a person they baptize into Christ's body to be accepted into a Baptist congregation in the same process is totally unacceptable! Do I hear an *amen* from all you in the Church of Christ?

So when a Baptist wants to become a part of your congregation, you accept him readily with no questions asked. Right? Rarely! Most of our people would demand that the person be baptized again in order to be baptized into the Church

of Christ. The person did not follow our procedure! When they obey Christ's command to be baptized, we call it *Baptist baptism*, but when we obey the command, do we call it *Church of Christ baptism*? No, we call it Scriptural baptism into the one body. Then the baptized person aligns himself with a congregation denominated as a Church of Christ Good!. They baptize a person into the one body and he aligns himself in the process with a denomination designated as a Baptist church. Bad! Did we drop a thread somewhere there in weaving our fabric?

All right, you seek to escape the judgment we lay on others by saying that Baptists are not baptized purposefully for the remission of sins, hence, it is not valid. So let's talk about those in the Christian Church. They proclaim and practice the same "steps of salvation" that we do. Some of them are even taught and converted by use of the same Jule Miller films that some of us use to convert people. They are not baptized into the local Christian Church but into the Lord's body, the saved, the universal church just as we claim to be. Then they align themselves with a local group of the saved called a Christian Church instead of a group of them called a Church of Christ. But when a brother from the Christian Church asks to be added to our congregation, is he gladly accepted? Even though it is changing now, through most of my long career, our people generally would demand that he be baptized again in order to become a member of the Church of Christ. That is tantamount to saying there is *Christian Church baptism* and *Church of Christ baptism*.

Years ago as I worked in Southern Louisiana, there was a variety of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. When persons from the different divisions came to "place membership," I usually made no mention to the congregation that they came from a different group, for I would have had at least someone to object. So it was no problem. But while serving in New Braunfels, Texas, a brother whom the congregation knew was of the Christian Church "came forward" asking to be a part of our congregation. Knowing the feeling of some in the leadership there, for me to have welcomed him openly would have been "hair in the butter," to use our old farm expression. So, as tactfully as I could, I explained to him and the congregation that we would need to confer later to see that we were on common ground. No conference was necessary, however, for he never came back. And who could blame him? We were the ones at fault, not him. The Lord had added him to the same body he had made us parts of, but we sat in judgment on him because he had not followed our procedure.

Among those who will grant the validity of the baptism of a person in the Christian Church, some demand a confession of sin for his having been in the Christian Church. While admitting that he is a brother in Christ, they classify him as a *brother in error* (as though there is any other kind of brothers!) because he had joined a congregation of the Christian Church instead of one of the Church of Christ.

We can see gaps in the logic of others while blind to our own. Would Jesus not poke fun at us like he did the Pharisees for trying to pick specks out of the eyes of others while we have a stick in our own? We don't like such candid talk about ourselves. If my mention of these things rankles you, it may be that it is because it is so true! We have to meet the standard that we demand of others. *"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get"* (Matt. 7:1).

In the judgment, if God asks you why you rejected most of his believers on earth and you explain that they had errors in belief and practice, do you think he will welcome you because you had no errors in belief or practice? Or will he measure you by the rule you measured others by?

If we could be flawless in belief and practice, we would need no grace.

Study For Yourself!

In our zeal to change people from what we have considered to be error, we have urged emphatically that they study the Bible for themselves instead of accepting teachings already formulated and handed down to them. We have made that plea to those within our own congregations also. And who will take issue with that? Religion is personal rather than conforming to a system developed by fallible men.

When someone studies for himself, learns of misdirections in the system, and offers corrective teaching, how do you react to him? The roadside of my life in the church is strewn with those honest people who dared to go beyond simplistic pronouncements of the system and tried to enlighten the group. They have been beaten down, rejected, frozen out, misrepresented, maligned, and disfellowshipped. Organized churches in general have their written constitutions, laws, and by-laws, while we have our set of unwritten laws, to control teaching and practices. Churches do not hire preachers to reform them! The *powers that be* in the churches act as watchdogs to make sure that the status quo is maintained.

Another Book

I have another little book which may be rare, for it was rescued from a sort of book-burning. It is of The Living Word series of adult study literature titled *The Lord's Supper*, by Warren Lewis, copyrighted in 1966 by R. B. Sweet, Inc.

This *mature study for adults* did not repeat all our traditional concepts and cliches about the Communion. It was not an indoctrination giving ready-made answers which would provoke no study. Though there are a number of points in it that I question, I recognize it as a provocative treatment of the Lord's Supper. But such cannot be allowed! If the powers that be in the church do not tell people what to believe, they may be led astray. Nothing should be left open-ended. So some of the brothers who are *somewhat* cried aloud. Wary and loyal congregations would not order their literature from a firm that published such unsound stuff. The book was recalled! I don't know how they disposed of the stock. Do you suppose the city of Austin might have considered them toxic waste unsuitable for the garbage dump? ☺

We have no church creed, we have insisted, but everyone should study for himself/herself to find the truth. Then we have closely controlled by the reigns of criticism, intimidation, and denunciation what is taught. When disciples learn a new concept and teach it, they rock the boat. Preachers lose their jobs for introducing corrective ideas. Teachers in church-related institutions have to be cautious not to roil the critical supporters. I have heard speakers at lectureships and seminars *almost* challenge some of our basic concepts, only to be left void. We call loudly for others to change but block it among ourselves.

One of the derogatory terms now attached to reformers is *change agent*. Anyone trying to change the status quo is a dreadful *change agent*. Just indoctrinate! Catechize! Drill! But don't open the doors to real learning!

I owe much to many teachers who have dared to question and think. Among them are Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Braving the censure of our brethren, twenty and thirty years ago, through their journals they were saying things courageously that we desperately needed to heed. Carl spoke by invitation on the campuses of 250 colleges and universities including Harvard and Yale, and Leroy has been a respected university professor and lecturer who conducted many weekend seminars. To put it mildly, though, these men were not given exactly what we might call the red carpet reception in our own congregations, colleges, universities, and journals.

Much of the good change now working in our congregations was initiated by the teachings of those two men. Some of their concepts are now being repeated from pulpits and in the academic setting – from speakers who still consider it indiscreet to mention their names or give them any credit.

In the last decade, however, a growing number of our people are rising up to call them blessed. Their materials may be accessed at my web site. The Lord is working great corrective change among us. Disciples are becoming aware that we have demanded of others what we did not demand of ourselves. So many of us who have refused to measure ourselves by the rule we impose on others are recognizing that none of us are correct in all matters of doctrine and practice so that we must cut slack for others as we wish for it to be given us. Our wish for ourselves and others is like that expressed by a man toward God in an old Scottish epitaph:

*Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod,
Hae mercy on my soul, Lord God;
As I would do, were I Lord God,
And Ye were Martin Elginbrod.*

No, we do not approve all things taught and practiced in all other Christian groups. Are we in the Church of Christ perfected in all teachings and practices, or is it just easier and more comforting to see and judge the flaws in others?

Paul's searing rebuke to his Jewish brothers should quicken our consciences today. *"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and you do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?"* (Rom. 2:1-3).

Read all of Chapter 2 which includes this withering sarcasm, *"...if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself?"* (2:19-21).

Let's let God be the judge, *"For God shows no partiality"* (v. 11). []

The Coming of the Lord #3

In the last two issues we have given you a long list of references from the Scriptures relating to the coming of the Lord. All of the events predicted at least seem to indicate an imminent fulfillment, that is, within the lifetime of some of the very ones to whom they were addressed. This will now be an

effort to highlight some of the explanations to claims of fulfilled prophecy, or realized eschatology, culminating about AD 70.

These explanations will not be all of my own discovery even though I will offer some commentary. They are introduced to provoke restudy of this subject rather than to offer conclusive statements. Specific views held on these matters are not basic to our salvation. For example, we may have varying perceptions of the resurrection without denying the resurrection, which is one of the basic elements of the gospel. Different views should not be pressed into divisive issues.

We have set forth passages indicating that *the end of the age, the end, and the last times, days, etc.* all relate to the same time and events. Also relating to the same period are *the day, that day, the day of the Lord, the day of God, the great day, the last day, the day of wrath, the day of judgment, and the day of redemption.*

When these are all related to the coming of Jesus in power with his angels, his raising the dead, his rendering judgment, and his enduring presence with us, it seems to contradict many of our previous concepts. Our traditional varied understandings ignore or explain away the impact of the many passages we have listed which speak of their imminent fulfillment at the time they were given. Cannot you agree that more study on the subject would be helpful?

The first reaction to the claims of fulfilled prophecies seem natural. Every eye has not seen him return as he promised. The graves and tombs of the dead are still intact. We have not been called to a great scene of universal judgment. Evidently, the saints have not been caught up to meet the Lord for they are still here. The sun has not darkened, the stars have not all fallen from heaven, the heavens have not passed away, the elements have not been dissolved by fire, the earth and its works have not been burned up, and the new heaven and earth have not appeared. It is as simple as that! Or, is it?

Because we are earthly and have to interpret through physical senses, God has accommodated his messages to our ability to comprehend. We cannot comprehend an immortalized being, or a spirit, either ours or God who is Spirit, so we develop our own imagery, giving physical characteristics or forms. Much, though not all, communication from God is through imagery. Many literary enhancements are employed. Hebrew writers sometimes described God's dealings with man in exaggerated cataclysmic physical descriptions. We may miss the meaning when we interpret all these things literally in physical imagery.

"Every Eye Shall See Him"

Questioning the literal concept about every eye seeing him when he returns, have you ever considered what that would require? Allowing that he would come within one-half mile of each person, traveling 1000 miles per hour, it would take a full day (half of which would be in the dark of night) to circle the earth near the equator, and he would have to circle the earth about 7000 times, taking maybe 10 years. Allow for my

incorrect geography and math. We would hardly be able to see the nail-scars in his hands literally!

Consider, too, the literary style. *"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him"* (Rev. 1:7). By apposition, those who pierced him, the tribes, would be those who would see him. Those who would see him are those who crucified him, and his coming would be

to avenge the tribes of Israel. Matthew 24:30-34 identifies this as the time of Jesus' coming on the clouds which that generation would live to see. Zechariah 12:10-14 adds verification. So that has already happened! There is actual, literal verification of some of it in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Have the stars all fallen, has heaven been destroyed, have the sun and moon been darkened, and has the Lord come on the clouds? Yes! But not literally. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, those things occurred.

Isaiah warned Babylon in dramatic imagery of God's dealing with them. *"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ... therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place...etc."* (Isa. 13). In God's fury against the nations, *"Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. ... And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever"* (Isa. 34; Read other declarations in Ezek. 32:1-7; Isa. 7, 18, 19 against Egypt, Damascus, and Ethiopia). Isaiah further warns, *"An oracle concerning Egypt, Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt"* (Isa. 19:1).

These things were fulfilled thousands of years ago when God overthrew orders, systems, and nations and those rulers and dignitaries associated with them. Were they literal? Do we even need to argue that point? Was Jesus to come in a literal body riding on a literal cloud? Or must we allow for some imagery?

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his disciples of his coming and the close of the age. In dramatic imagery like that used by Isaiah and other Hebrew writers, he told them, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"* (Matt. 24: 1-3; 29-31; Compare Luke 21:22-27; 2 Peter 3:7-12; and the visionary, exaggerated depictions throughout Revelation).

Have those predictions been fulfilled? Unquestionably! -- unless you doubt Jesus or the accuracy of the Scriptures. After presenting that cataclysmic picture, he declared, *"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"* (v. 34-35). Luke identifies Jesus' predictions with the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies and the destruction of the city, declaring that it would be the time of the destruction of the disciples happening in the lifetime of that generation (Luke 21:20-33).

The Jewish listeners understood the highly dramatic language of Hebrew people, and they looked for the imminent fulfillment, as the many references in our previous articles verify without question. They looked for the end of the earthly order of the chosen people in an earthly kingdom. Their system would fall along with all the dignitaries who supported it by their authoritative positions. The spiritual kingdom would succeed it. It would be the last days of Judaism with no promise of

reinstatement. It would be the *parousia*, the coming of Christ in his enduring presence with his disciples. It would confirm the new heaven and new earth which is God's new and spiritual rule through Christ, the kingdom which cannot be shaken. Disciples are now in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the temple in which God dwells described in Revelation 21-22. They have eternal life with the Father and only await the discarding of the earthly body.

"True Literalism"

True literalism is a fantasy. (An oxymoron?) Can a literal body ride a literal cloud, a cold, tumultuous vapor which can toss an airplane about? Where and in what direction would the billions of immense stars fall? If the heavens pass away, what is left? A vacuum? Outer space is already a vacuum strewn with elements forming celestial bodies. Can the elements be consumed by fire so as to obliterate them (2 Peter 3:7-12)? And where would we be during the annihilation of the universe?

Is there to be no end to this physical earth and the universe? Despite the propensity in all generations to think that the destruction of the material universe has been imminent in their times, there is only questionable support in the Scriptures for it. All the expectancy expressed these days surrounding the end of this millennium is baseless babble.

If these things have transpired, how do we explain the "rapture," the judgment, and the resurrection? Here I will mingle my comments with highlighted suggestions of Evangelist John L. Bray (see note below for source). He is not dogmatic but is exploring in depth the preterist view of prophecy very honestly and candidly.

Here is a statement of his premise: "When Christ came in A.D. 70, He raised all the Old Testament saints. This included all who had died during the Old Covenant age, right on up to the time of His *parousia* in A.D. 70. This included the martyrs of Revelation 20:4 who died under the tribulations of the Beast Nero and who were seen in John's prophecy later living and reigning with Jesus Christ. All of these were resurrected when Christ came, as it says in 1 Corinthians 15:23 when Paul showed the order of the resurrection – 'afterward those that are Christ's at his coming' (or 'in his presence')."

Christ was the firstfruits who had destroyed the power of death.. Afterwards (40 years later) the sleeping Christians with those mentioned above were raised in the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5). They preceded those still living: "*the dead in Christ shall rise first*" (1 Thes. 4:16). But the resurrection is not over. As individuals who were still living would die later, they would be raised, caught up, or "raptured." Raising the dead is a continuous process since the *parousia*. So, contrary to the general understanding of a one-time event, the raising of individuals as they leave this physical body continues. "*And the dead in Christ will rise first; then (which means afterwards) 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.*" (2 Thes. 4:16-27). Generally, we have understood *then* to mean *at that time* and the remaining living being *caught up* collectively in living bodies. Consider an alternate interpretation. Afterward, as each individual hears his trumpet call to leave his earthly tent behind, he will be caught up (raptured) in immortality to be with the Lord. And who will contend that the risen dead and those caught up in literal bodies will live unendingly suspended in literal clouds?

This would be an immediate transition. Previously, all who died were "asleep," awaiting the conquest of death by Jesus. Paul wrote that "*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" (1 Cor. 15:51f). Thus, the person-by-person resurrection will be the raising up, lifting up, catching up – the rapture of the saints as each one dies.

"*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (2 Cor. 5:1). The lifting up (rapture) is not physical levitation. This earthly temporary house, tabernacle, tent is the outward man. The inward man is the kernel planted to receive the new body or immortal covering so it will not be "naked" (1 Cor. 15:37). "Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked" (2 Cor. 5:2-3). As the outward man of the disciple is perishing, the inward man is being renewed (2 Cor. 4:16). The faithful never die (sleep) (John 11:26). Mortality is swallowed up of life; death is swallowed up in victory (2 Cor. 5:4; 1 Cor. 15:54).

Contrary to common belief, man is not born immortal, having unending existence. That nature belongs to God. "*To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*" ... "*the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see*" (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). We must seek it: "*Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuing in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life*" (Rom. 2:6-7).

Immortality Is Given

That gift of immortality comes in the resurrection. "*the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When this perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'*" (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

When we begin to question how literal and physical the resurrection body will be, we are treading on holy ground. This mortal will put on immortality and this perishable will put on the imperishable, but in putting on the one, the other is discarded. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. However, that does not say we will have a "spiritual physical" body! That is an oxymoron. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Jesus said a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). There is no such thing as immortalized flesh, blood, and bones – immortalized, spiritual minerals and earthly elements which we ate on earth from garden or animal. We will have no digestive system, for need for food would indicate depletion of body cells and energy, hence a perishable nature. No flesh needing sustenance, no blood needing a heart and arterial system, no bones needing minerals, no depletion needing food and oxygen from lungs, no marriage or procreation needing sexuality. From our earthly viewpoint we cannot picture such a spiritual being.

In death the mortal and perishable body is put off. If God actually raises the physical components, he can do it without disturbing the soil of the graveyard! Our earthly components disperse in death with time. Various persons have been burned up, atomized in explosions, eaten by humans, eaten by animals, eaten and disintegrated in the ocean, died in the womb with the mother, and some were never entombed on earth. If those molecules are important in the resurrection, God can assemble them and change them without our observation. If the physical body is somehow transferred into the spiritual world, we might prefer that God reassemble the molecules composing our body at the age of twenty rather than those of the

debilitated, aged body of our death. My point is that we can only conceive of a spirit by relating to the physical, and that may not be accurate imagery.

We must also look at the matter of the predicted judgment. Jesus declared, "*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*" (Matt. 16:27-27). He reasserted this prophecy in Matthew 24:29-34. In the next chapter he describes the judgment scene when he was to come in glory with his angels (25:31-46). Only two days after revealing that, Jesus assured the High Priest who judged him, "*You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26:64). Was Jesus giving a false promise, or did the High Priest live to see that event of his coming and judgment?

The Scriptures do not describe that procedure except in the parable of the sheep and goats. My imagery of a person-by-person sort of trial before God would be amiss, however. If five billion persons were raised and brought before him and each was given only one minute of hearing, it would require more than 9,000 years to judge them. We can believe, how-ever, that those in the first resurrection were judged because of the promise and because of the physical evidence in the destroying of Jerusalem.

The preterist interpretation of these prophecies has far reaching implications which I have only pointed to. As we would expect, there are different opinions being studied. As you consider the few details that I have dealt with here, please review the numerous references to the *parousia* listed in the first two discourses.

Again, this is not a life-threatening subject. It does not question teachings basic to salvation. It does not even question the necessity of baptism or try to introduce instrumental music! ☺ At this moment I have no plans to write more on the subject. For two reasons I leave this open-ended. First, I do not have the answers. Second, I want you to give some deeper study to it. For your help, I will list below some sources other than the Bible which deal with preterist eschatology giving various views.

Other Literature

Just for a starter, you might get John Bray's 38-page booklet. *The Rapture of Christians*, to which I referred above offers startling new insights to me. Send \$2.00 for it and he will send a list of other materials: John L Bray Ministry, Inc., P.O. Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804. Also, his 293-page *Matthew 24 Fulfilled* is \$15.00 postpaid.

In the first two articles I scanned some of the 561-page *The Parousia*, by James Stuart Russell. Much convincing material, easy to read. \$17.00 postpaid from Kingdom Counsel, 122 Seaward Ave., Bradford, PA 16701.

Stanley Paher's 190-page *Matthew 24* will be sent for \$10.95 if you mention me! Other preterist materials also. Nevada Publications, 4135 Badger Circle, Reno, NV 89509.

The Last Days?, (127 pages) by Ron McRay, 10938 Spring Club Lake, Tyler, TX 75706.

The Cross and the Parousia of Christ, by Max King is a detailed study of 800 pages. Related to it, 8-lesson, well-produced, audio tapes with charts and guide by Tim King and Jack C. Scott, Jr., *Covenant Eschatology: A Comprehensive Overview*, is also available from Living Presence Ministries, 4705 Parkman Road NW, Warren, OH 44481, phone 330-898-

5760, email: <LPM@livingpresence.org>, Website: <www.livingpresence.org>

Don K. Preston, 421 Maxwell Ave, Ardmore, OK 73401 has published several books, including *II Peter 3*. Email: <dkpret@brightok.net>, Website: <www.eschatology.org>.

For the greatest list of current books and tapes on preterist eschatology that I am aware of, contact Ed Stevens at Kingdom Publications, 122 Seaward Ave, Bradford, PA 16701-1515, phone 814-368-6578, e-mail <preterist1@aol.com>. []

HOOK'S POINTS

Your gracious expressions have wafted Lea and me heavenward! Nothing I have written has brought such loving response as that you have given to the article about Lea. She has been touched deeply. You are a caring and supportive circle. Thank you.

Maybe I should have been writing about her all along instead of all those doctrinal quibbles! Even as I jest about it, I can see a truth that has been evasive to us: God is much more concerned about our loving each other than in all our doctrinal quibbles. He did not give us a list of justifying rules and rituals, but his directives only guide us into the expression of love to him and one another.

Some of you have called. I have included many of the notes you sent; however, some were lost in my shuffle of paperwork. One that is of particular interest is from Leon Roberts whom I have not met. He has an association with funeral homes and crematories nationwide. In my article I mentioned that Lea and I intended to be cremated. As a loving gesture, Leon has offered to take care of that for us without charge! We are appreciative for that generous gift.

Does that qualify me for some Book of Records? Has any other preacher been offered a free cremation? As I wrote Leon, I think some of the brethren have sort of looked forward to the devil doing that for me. Because of my busy week, I have neglected setting up an appointment for it!

Some statistics for August were sent by Vic Phares who takes care of all the technical stuff of our web site. These figures also include hits to other writings listed at our web site. Our outreach is expanding, thanks to Vic. It is awesome!

Unique Hosts accessing site: 4284
Total bytes transferred: 360,024,501
Web page hits by day: lowest - 351; highest 2674
3327 hits from about 50 foreign nations

The translation into Telegu has been completed, but no resources are yet available for the printing of it. A thousand copies would cost about \$1500. Due to a crash of Robert Acosta's computer, the Spanish translation of FIC has been delayed, but it should be ready this fall.

This is a one-man operation from this end. The "one man" tries to fill orders and keep records, but he guarantees no inerrancy. He cannot send invoices, check for delinquent payments, and send reminders. So please help by figuring your own payment from the brochure, making sure you send it, and letting us know when we have erred in filling your order. We try to acknowledge each donation, but forgive us of any oversight in that. We are generally inundated by paperwork. Thank you.

Russ Hooper has been serving the congregation in Missoula, Montana. It is a liberated, innovative group with 75 to 90 in attendance. Russ has moved to Fort Worth. So they will be looking for a truly grace-oriented preacher. E-mail: <owense@montana.com>.

"God spoke to me!" "God put this on my heart to share with you." If that be true, the whole world should listen to what he told you, for that is as authentic as Scripture! A few years ago a brother told me that God spoke to him and told him the specific month, day, and year when Jesus is to return. I did

not write it down, and now have forgotten it, but I think it was to be just a few years past the turn of the century. Am I to ignore that "revelation"? Is the one you receive any more authentic? Does God deliver new oracles to people today? Or are those expressions just a faddish means of trying to add weight to your words?

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

I am writing to say that I have been thinking some of those same thoughts concerning worship and emotions. I grew up much the way you described only in the 70s. My parents were both grounded in their faith and lived it each day. My father was a preacher, Christian College teacher and missionary. My mother was a devoted wife and mother. Our worship experiences ranged from informal gatherings of missionary families, family devotional, native worship, and traditional services in Texas congregations. Many times I saw my father cry as he talked about his Savior or some other subject that might stir emotion. So, while my worship experiences were almost always non-emotional in nature, I was also taught that emotion is a normal expression when thinking about love, compassion, etc.

It was not until I took a group of teenagers to ACU to attend KADESH that I realized there were people who thought the only real worship was emotional. While I was slow to judge these people and their motives, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the idea that my worship might be looked at as less than true "spirit and truth" worship. This made me want to experience something wild and exciting so I would know that my worship was real. At the same time I was seeing the kids in my youth group "turned on" to the "experience" that was not only the worship times, but also the opportunities they were having to confess in groups and do things that made their faith come alive. I certainly didn't want to put out their flame by saying, "You know this is all great and wonderful, but I'm just not feelin' it!" But the more I considered worship and what God wants, I see that it is a faithfulness and devotion to Him that endures. Emotion might be something that happens anytime for any reason. Some people just seem to be inclined to be more emotional. I also realized that some of the most reverent and worshipful believers seem to have a "dead" worship style. How tragic it seems to me when I hear a young person in a KADESH group express frustration that she must return to her home congregation where the singing is "dead."

I believe we must teach that unity is based upon Jesus and a faith in him. Worship will be worship only if it is done in "spirit and in truth." If feelings and emotions are a by-product, fine. If they are not, fine. As long as the worshiper is worshipping in "spirit and in truth" we must not judge others and their worship based on their non-emotional style.

May we all continue, also, to "see that we are one" as Jesus prayed for all believers. -David Bryant, Jasper, TX <david@jas.net>

Your books and information have been very useful, good, challenging, refreshing, etc. I appreciate your ministry. I recently received the seven copies of *The Stone-Campbell Movement*. I've already given away three of them. I hope to have the opportunity to order more! -Louisiana

Thanks for a much needed and refreshing book (Free In Christ). It's truly been an eye opener. I pray that all the denominations and non-denominations the world over come to recognize the freedom we have in Christ. Signed, Mesquite, TX.

Thank you, Mr Hook, for your emails. I have especially appreciated this one. I am currently reading about the Reformation period in history and the same point keeps hitting

me in the face: What changed peoples hearts, what gave them courage, what they were willing to die for, was not their emotional experiences but, rather, the Word of God. When reading the scriptures and hearing God's Word, they were aware of the Spirit of God in their life. But what they defended, what they preached, what they were willing to be imprisoned and tortured and burned or drowned for, was the WORDS, not the Spiritual experiences, of God. The Spirit of God was ever present with them as they sought the scriptures and courageously shared what God revealed through His living Word. His Spirit, in us, is what gives us insight and the words meaning. The Holy Spirit was there when the words were written and He is there when we, as believers, read the words. The Spirit was their much needed Comforter in their trials and in ours. But what does the Spirit always guide us toward, but God and His Holy Word?

I desire for more freedom, yes, even emotion, in congregational worship. I realize the dangers that could arise, but if we are a church TRULY devoted to study, I believe we can work through those dangers. Am I an idealist?

I appreciate your view on the Lord's Supper. I, too, would like this time to be more special. I don't see THAT one changing in the CofC for a long time, if ever! So, do I change fellowship? I don't think God has led OUR family to leave the CofC but, instead, to receive what encouragement we can from the messages preached, from the Words of God spoken, from the praises sung, from the believers who love us, to be His servants there, and then receive our most sustaining nourishment from our own prayer and study. After all, OUR faith in Christ is what brings us to His gift of salvation, not the faith of the church.

I pray that your study and ours will encourage a Reformation in people's hearts. That they will see the value and utter necessity in His Word. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in TRUTH." (III John 1:4). -Kim Williams, Singapore, <tamgo56@mbox3.singnet.com.sg>

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>

I am enjoying reading your article, "My Conversion Experience." It is very sensible -- yes, emotions cannot indicate our spiritual condition.

I think that probably the reason you did not change after you were baptized was because you had already been following Christ. You could not "begin" a journey whose beginning probably -- and let's be honest here -- resides in time before you could even talk. You were following Christ because your parents were teaching you to, and because they had been teaching you to from the time you were born. In such a case where it is very clear that parents are bringing their children up to be Christians, it would actually make perfect sense to baptize the children at birth. And there is no reason why small children so baptized should not participate in Holy Communion, for the simple reason that they are following Christ no less faithfully than their more rational counterparts.

As regards Holy Communion, the Orthodox Church (which claims to carry the unaltered traditions of the Disciples themselves, right down to the very Greek they spoke and the very words they used) celebrates Holy Communion only on Easter Sunday. In preparation for this, they fast and pray for forty days prior to this. Holy Communion for them is no mere rip'n'dip and then out for coffee and fellowship; for it is the holiest thing in their lives. The service itself lasts three hours, and throughout it the participants stand or kneel, but never sit, since they feel themselves to be in the bodily presence of the

living and risen Christ. This is an example that the rest of Christ's Church would benefit by following (except, of course, for the ancient Greek – I don't think the Disciples ever intended that the Gospel should be incomprehensible.) -Judith McRae, Calgary, AB Canada <jmcrac@acs.ucalgary.ca>

Your comments made me think of a quote I read in Michael Phillip's biography of George MacDonald, Scotland's beloved story teller. MacDonald was surely not afraid to doubt, and it produced in his life a really deep and abiding love and trust in our savior. He said, "*He that feareth, Lord, to doubt, in the doubt feareth Thee.*" May we never fear to doubt, resting always and surely in the grace of our Father through His mercy to us in our Lord and Savior Jesus the Anointed! -Eric Cohoon <ecohoon@nerfield.com>

Shame, shame, shame on you!!! You did the one thing a gospel preacher should never do. You weakened the faith of no telling how many believers by your lesson. Now I do not object to this type of study and always am willing to look into the deeper matters of the word, BUT it is wrong to do what you have done and not offer a conclusion to the study. My Bible teaches that all things are to be edifying and your study is certainly not that. You cast doubt on the faith of millions and leave them hanging in doubt. If what you teach is true then you must go forward and show what is left for us that are living today. -Signed

Years ago I "stumbled" onto your *Free In Christ* and couldn't believe that someone else in the church had some of the same questions that I dared not speak. It was so refreshing and since then, I have come to learn more and more of God's wonderful grace. I now teach a ladies Bible class and always my big stress is truth and not tradition. So far, the noose has not tightened and I will continue to speak out as long as the opportunity allows. Thank you for the first sign of hope that I ever saw. -Signed

I just had to tell you: That tribute to your sweet wife is one beautiful piece of prose! What a blessing it was for me to be able to read it. Thanks for writing it. I will hug my wife of 20 years tonight and appreciate her all the more because of what you wrote about Lea. -Mark Flippin <mflippin@ghg.net>

What a beautiful love story. Thanks for sending it. It has brought tears to my eyes but not sadness. In many ways it is the story of mine and Cleo's life. We were together for forty-seven years and now she has gone on to wait for me. I hope you two will still be blessed with a little more time together. Every day is a wonderful gift. God bless you both. -V. W. Hayhurst <Papaw12@aol.com>

Cecil, I can't tell you how touched I was by your tribute to your "Girl In The Front Seat." "Less emotional nature", my eye! It was beautiful and came from the heart, which made it so special. Linton and I have a very special, close relationship also and can relate to much of what you said. Thank you so very much for sharing your life with us. We love and appreciate you both. Linton and I want to wish you both Happy Anniversary and Happy Birthdays. -Denise Lipscomb, New Braunfels, TX.

That was such a beautiful tribute to Lea. She's a lucky woman! -Brooke Davis <barefoot@accutek.com>

Talk about an article that can truly make someone's day! Congratulations to both of you. May the Lord give you a long and prosperous life! I too am not afraid of the transition from this life to eternity. Rest assured, as soon as I meet my Lord and track down the Apostle Paul, I will be looking for you and that girl in the front seat!

Do not take this the wrong way, but in addition to being a C of C minister, I also own a funeral home and do cremations. If time should arise, I have funeral homes and crematories across the nation I work with. I feel indebted to you both for writing *Free In Christ*. It changed my life, my preaching, etc. In an effort to show my appreciation, I would gladly handle any cremation arrangements for you or Lea on the house. It would be an honor and a small way of being able to do something for the both of you. I have distributed many copies of *Free In Christ*, and it has changed many folks' lives! Thank you! Even when you are gone from us, *Free In Christ* must continue to set people free! -Leon Roberts, Fort Lauderdale, FL <LRobe22475@aol.com>

I enjoyed your letter about your life with Lea. Such a sweet tribute to your lovely wife. My husband and I have only been married for 41 years, but we have experienced much of the closeness that you and Lea have in our walk together. Thank you for sharing with your readers. I appreciate you stand on legalism – it has made all the difference. -Jane Ford <jaford@fortwayne.infi.net>

It's midnight but I just had to let you know how wonderful #31 was. My wife and I will be married 48 years soon and we feel and experience the things you wrote of. Thank you again for sharing this with me. P.S.: I also believe immortality will be immediate. -Charles Bowers <Cbowers32@aol.com>

I was deeply touched by your tribute to Lea. I think you put yourself down too much when you bad-mouth yourself for not being romantic. Of course you are a romantic. Forget all that left-brained balderdash. You just express your romantic side with the pen. I'm of a similar bent. Once I gave my wife a book of Kahil Gibran's poems. She told me, "That's not you." She is absolutely right. If I can't do it with a little twist of outlandish humor, I can't do it. -Norman Bales <nlbales@allaboutfamilies.org>

Your loving tribute to Lea blessed me. I am still wiping tears from my face. God has been so good to us, hasn't He!!! God bless you and Lea even more! -Bob West <Theophilus@CITCOM.NET>

Thank you for the beautiful tribute to your wife, Lea. It was so beautifully written, and certainly indicates a deep love and attachment for these 53 years. May God continue to bless

you both. My wife, Carolyn, and I are coming up to 46 years of marriage soon. I appreciate you, and others like you, who are giving our young people a good example of long-term marriage. It is so sad to see the way people walk in and out of marriages today. -Jim Hawkins <jim@helinet.com>

Ah! To be so loved! It is every soul's dream! Your latest *Freedom's Ring* on Lea is so special – so darling – so rare! -- so moving! Cecil, your very capacity to love Lea as you do is rare in the world of men! Most men never have/make time or are able to so love! Thank you both my dears, for lifting us "higher than we deserve", but your kind of love does that. -Kathy Wyler, Kerrville, TX.

Thank you for all the wonderful things in *Freedom's Ring*. They are all really good but your writing about Lea is the best you will ever do. Sixty-three years ago Wynona was a blind

date my girl set up for my best friend. Wynona still teases me that I couldn't drive for looking over into the back seat at her. - Hub Blankenship, Eufaula, OK.

About a year ago, our Father placed me in a COC here in (Northwest) to grow in my understanding. Apparently, there are many wonderful brethren whom He is shaking. Sometimes (mostly) my "assignment" is not easy. Often all I can share is that we are not to become too comfortable here, not a popular message. Your resources have been invaluablely encouraging to me and I would like you to know that your ministry is a blessing to many. Thank you. I love you, brother. Now get back to work!! <cccconcepts@earthlink.net>

Brother Hook, it's been a while since I've visited the site, but I've been enjoying the studies you've done on the A.D. 70 possibilities. I appreciate more than anything your encouragement to people to study and pray without fear of a tyrannical God ready to mete out eternal torture to any sincere seeker who, due to human limitations, does not immediately and fully possess perfect knowledge. What the body of Jesus needs more than ever is more devoted disciples who pledge themselves to the "Jesus life" and to unity among believers, who will never have perfect knowledge or agree on every issue. May God give us more humility, wisdom, love, and singleness of heart in attaining pure discipleship. <BeLikeJesus@juno.com>

Thank you, Cecil, for all you have done. It is a continuing struggle to help those who are still mired in the muck of legalism to find the freedom and love in Christ that you so eloquently tell us about. -Fred Green, Las Vegas, NV <PoolVacMan@lvcm.com>

I praise God for what He is doing on this site. It is awesome for me now that I am beginning to experience the freedom of Christ. For all my life, I have believed what I have been taught. But now that I have gone away to college I am developing my own beliefs. Your sites and books have helped me out in this quest. Never lose heart or faith. You are doing a great thing for the kingdom. Keep it up. I hope to meet you one day. God bless you. -Travis Stanley, Montgomery, AL <travs814@hotmail.com>.