

Roses With Other Names

Inheriting all the rationalizations of my people in defense of a distinctive name for the church, I also joined in contending that *Church of Christ* was "the Scriptural name." It seemed hard to dispute that since Romans 16:16 spoke of *churches of Christ*. If a plurality of congregations were churches of Christ, then one congregation would be a Church of Christ. That seemed logical, though I failed to see that Paul was not writing about the name of a church.

Later, recognizing that the church should have no distinctive proper name which would be denominating, I accepted the *church of Christ* grammatical structure of the name. That was ill-advised because I still used it as a designating name on signs, letterheads, and listings. That violated a simple rule of grammar which demands that proper names be capitalized. Also, I dared not use *church of God* (1 Cor. 1:2) on the signs. A person did not need to be too bright to recognize my ignorant zeal.

In spite of being taught, even in college, that the word *church* is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, "called out", after many years I looked for myself and discovered that such is not a proper translation, for *church* is translated from the Greek *kuriakos* (see your English dictionary). That word is never used in the Scriptures to refer to God's saved people. So, I was making a non-Scriptural word into a Scriptural name for them.

As many years passed and I began to see that, even though there were a number of designations or descriptions of the body of believers with none to be worn as a name, I thought a remedy for division into denominations would be to discard all names. In the early days of the church, there were no sectarian groups, hence, no differentiating names. The believers were one. Why not be like that today?

So why not? The believers in most all modern groups agree that they will not be saved because of wearing a certain distinctive name. They all agree that there is only one universal "called out" congregation or community of believers. When individuals meet in local groups to serve together, they are still parts of the universal community of disciples whether they wear a name or not. They understand that just as a penny, is a denominational part of a dollar, those saved individuals in the various groups are parts of the universal church. But no group of them is the universal, saved body for the body is not composed of local groups but of individuals. So, let us try to implement this "no-name - no-organization" concept.

Let us suppose that an industry is started in a more remote area. A few hundred people move there forming a new town named Rainbow City. In the rush to provide new homes, no buildings for worship are yet constructed. Let us imagine some person advertising to contact other Christian believers.

A surprising number meet with him. He has a startling proposal.

This brother suggests that they go back to basics dropping sectarian names and organizational baggage. He suggests that they discard all distinctive names, build no buildings for separate groups, and just meet in their homes like many did in Jerusalem in the beginning. There would be no organization above the house assemblies. They all agree. So they call a city-wide meeting to inaugurate this plan.

A great number of believers attend the meeting. After preliminary discussion, a call is made for persons willing to have a group of up to thirty people to meet in their homes. A sufficient number volunteers. Their names and addresses are revealed. Since no one will assume authority to assign persons to a specific host or hostess, a get-acquainted time is allowed for each person to choose with which host or hostess to meet. Also, they advertise a phone number where an inquirer may learn of the various locations of assemblies.

In the first meeting in the home of Gene Green, one person explains apologetically, "I recognize you as my brothers and sisters in Christ, but I am very uncomfortable with your lifting up hands, clapping, and claims of tongue speaking." The host responds, "Brother, we understand. We respect your convictions. Why don't you try the non-charismatic group meeting with Bill Brown?"

A woman calls for information explaining that she wishes to serve with a group that will use her talents for leadership and teaching. She is directed to the home of Blanche White who hosts a group which makes no distinction between the sexes.

Another family visits several different groups but finds that none of them have weekly communion and all use instrumental music. On calling the information number, the man explains that, though he does not judge others of different conviction about those things, he cannot conscientiously sing with instrumental accompaniment or willingly miss weekly communion. So he is advised to meet in the home of Ray Gray where others hold the same convictions.

In broken English an interested person inquires about the possibility of a Spanish-speaking group and is happily directed to the home of Blanco Rojo.

Then there is the fellow who calls and explains that his wife was having a baby at the time of the initiation of the no-name home assemblies. Now he and his wife want to have the baby christened and dedicated publicly. Simple. Just go to the group meeting with Mac Black.

Various other home groups are formed by people of similar interests and more specific preferences. Some like informal assemblies while other prefer more liturgical services. Some have a core of several doctrinal issues they agree upon that are different from those of others. After several weeks of adjusting among house groups, it seems that everyone has found a group with whom to fit and work with ease. All want to put Christ at the center of all things. They are ready to work

together for the good of all, their works being individual activities rather than those of an organized system.

This revolutionary practice brings much excitement to the new community. All are happy to be just Christians. No one denies fellowship with others. Although they are in groups with some differing convictions, they all grant other individuals freedom to serve according to their understanding of the Scriptures. All attention is centered on serving Christ. No one even mentions the name of the church of his or her previous affiliation. They are all only Christians and Christians only.

Isn't this a beautiful concept? This would be a bold and commendable step in the right direction, but it would hardly solve the problem of distinctive groups as I once thought it would. Before moving to Rainbow City, those of similar convictions had been meeting in groups identified by a church name. Now these people of similar convictions have sorted themselves out and are being identified by the name or the address of a host or hostess. What is the difference? A rose by any other name will smell as sweet. They are just roses with other names. Or, maybe we could say that a rose by no name will smell just as sweet! They are just roses with no names.

What we have described in Rainbow City may be a part of the picture of the early church in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Formerly, overlooking the evident problems that the Scriptures point out in the early church, I was convinced that there was perfect harmony of belief, practice, and identification. However, in reality, there was much factionalism to contend with. For instance, there were the *circumcision* believers and the *uncircumcision* believers. Discomfort existed between Jewish and Greek disciples. Doctrinal difference between keepers of the Law and those who relied on grace strained unity. Some rejected others over the issues of eating meats and observing of days. Whether some of these contenders met separately or their partisan spirit was evident within the congregation as it was in Corinth, it was not always one happy family.

The rejecting, divisive party spirit was condemned. However, individual convictions were not condemned. The individual conscience was to be respected though not given license to rule over others. The idea that we can and must agree universally on all points of doctrine is a fantasy. The many who blithely and confidently declare that we can and must understand the Scriptures alike do not agree among themselves. Such a unity has never been and there is no prospect of it this side of heaven. Having different understanding and meeting separately for sake of conscience is not divisive if there is no attitude of rejection of others who differ. It is the rejection of other disciples that is divisive. In the Jerusalem church, for instance, the debate over circumcision could be heated, but until one side might reject the other over it, it would not be divisive. **It is the rejecter who is at fault rather than the one with a different conviction.**

In Rainbow City, the group meeting with Ray Gray, or any other host, would not have to investigate the views and practices of every other group and pass judgment in deciding whether to recognize them as Christ's disciples. **"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?"** (Rom. 14:4; read the chapter again!) Out of interest for common understanding, discussion of differences would be of value. If the discussions were to become confrontations to demand conformity, however, those seeking to bind conformity to their views would be divisive.

Conformity is possible so that no sign on the building would be of value. There was a long period of time when that

prevailed. It was during the Middle Ages. Then the religious system ruled with the civil government so that any dissenter could be dealt with and the "unity" would be preserved. **Enforced conformity is tyrannical.** Congregations, beware when you are so eager to publicly reject dissenters calling for reformation!

Martin Luther would have been a dead duck had the German princes not stood behind him politically and militarily. Eventually, the reformed church became the State Church in Germany replacing the Roman Catholic Church. Conformity to Lutheranism was then demanded in Germany. As reformation spread, conformity to different Protestant groups was enforced in various countries. That may be a kind of unity, but I don't think many of you want that – unless, perhaps, you could be the one to list the beliefs to be enforced!

Those who are so eager to reject others with whom they disagree have that spirit of tyranny – like Diotrophes who **"refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church"** (3 John 9-10). It well might be that Diotrophes was zealous to keep the church *pure* by driving out dissenters while preserving "the simple New Testament pattern." He exercised the spirit of tyranny in his own little domain to keep it free from those he judged to be undesirable because of their non-conformity.

The problem is much deeper than agreement on a name or lack of a name. It is deeper than whether we can agree to worship and serve in the same assemblies. **The party spirit and sectarian attitude in Corinth was no more acceptable while they met together than if they had met in their separate groups.** In Corinth there were certainly conflicting beliefs, yet Paul never urged the "loyal, true church" to separate from others due to their different beliefs in order to keep the church pure. He did urge them to be of one mind and to speak the same thing in focusing on Christ, the center of their unity. Being one in Christ had nothing to do with their agreement on such things as circumcision, eating meats, whether a woman could pray or prophesy, or whether or not they all drank of the same cup in communion. Far more important was their love and acceptance of each other as brothers and sisters through the grace of God in Christ.

How would you speak of other congregations that have as many serious problems as were in the Corinthian church? In your righteous stand for truth, would you be forced to deny their recognition as a "loyal, true church of Christ"? Was Paul soft and liberal, endorsing divisions, when he addressed them: **"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."** (1 Cor. 1:2)?

In Paul's corrective teaching, he called for them not to associate with immoral men and idolaters (5:9-13; 6:9-11), but his censured list does not include the doctrinally misinformed. He gave them redirection through teaching and exhortation, and surely we should follow that example.

"I cannot endorse all the beliefs and practices of all other churches," you may rightly protest. Neither can I! Neither was Paul endorsing everything in the Corinthian church of God! Neither am I suggesting that you endorse what your conscience will not allow. If your convictions do not permit you to sing with instrumental accompaniment, sing in a quartet in assemblies, drink from an individual cup in communion, or worship with the Baptists (except when they visit our services!), then don't do it! I don't know of any believer who would advise you to do it.

We have made a grave and disastrous error in equating the respecting of the convictions of others with whom we disagree with endorsing, condoning, or sanctioning their beliefs and practices. Consistent application of that will destroy any congregation. Every congregation is made up of people of varying beliefs and practices which are not approved by all others. You do not approve of every other person's beliefs, yet you recognize them as fellow-disciples with whom you meet and worship regularly. Are you giving blanket endorsement and approval? Or does their being in the Church of Christ – wearing the "right name" -- make their differences acceptable?

What I am suggesting is not an abandonment of all doctrinal teachings – accepting everybody and everything, as it is sometimes stated prejudicially. If the people of another church denies the incarnation, that Jesus was the Son of God, that his death was an atonement for sin, or that he was raised from the dead, then they have denied the foundation of faith. However, I don't think you will be confronted with a church like that for it would have no reason for existence. If, however, people who have accepted the Gospel and are dedicated to discipleship even as you are hold some practical differences of understanding on debatable matters, you are not given the luxury of rejecting them.

Our center of unity is Christ. If I reject others over a doctrinal matter unrelated to the saving Gospel, then I place greater emphasis on my interpretation than on unity in Christ. A rose of a different color, tint, or fragrance is still a rose. My interpretative hue and aroma of Christ may not be the same as yours. []

Hook's Points

Preachers, Ministers, Evangelists: If you are supported by the system, you are obliged to support the system. Congregations do not hire men to reform them but to perpetuate the existing system. If you have not rocked the boat in your congregation, it is most likely you have not introduced a new thought. Am I being too harsh? Really?

I will confess that I gave sufficient advertisement of my eightieth birthday! In spite of my senile self-centeredness, many of you were most gracious in sending your good wishes and expressions of love. Some of those notes and Christmas greetings are included in this issue, but there are many more. Each one is cherished. I wish that I could respond to all individually. Please accept our thanks. God has sent so many of you wonderful people into our lives as encouragers and partners. We are truly blessed.

Statistics for 1998 These figures are given because so many of you are or have been partners in one way or another in this ministry.

1624 copies of *Free In Christ* were distributed free of charge. I pay for the printing of all books and recover \$1.00 for each book given free. That does not cover the initial cost, but I pay postage for all books from our working fund. Since we began twelve years ago, 29,729 copies have been distributed free. They are your gifts to others.

Forty copies were sent in December (by invitation) for distribution at the women's conference in Germany.

\$1,500.00 was sent in December to India to print 1,000 copies of the Telugu translation of *Free In Christ* for free distribution. We had about enough to pay for the Spanish translation, but it is not ready yet. So I robbed that fund to go ahead with the Telugu. If it is not replenished, Lea and I will bear the cost ourselves, and we will recover nothing from this distribution.

\$1,227.67 remains in the working fund. From it we also pay for the *Freedom's Ring* mailout which is rather expensive. In fact, two copies mailed out would pay for a book in India.

1,120 of you receive FR by e-mail and 664 receive mailed copies.

68,200 times since we began our web page three years ago it has been accessed. Anyone anywhere on earth can access all of my writings at the site. They can read, print out, or download any or all of it at no cost. We have no way of knowing the extent of that outreach, but we receive grateful response from some. We have reason to believe that the free web site access has reduced the number of books sold.

Freedom's Ring is free for the asking. It is infrequent and may be phased out at any time. To subscribe to the e-mail edition, contact Vic s in Shreveport at <freedom@freedomring.org> Your letters are most welcome, however attachments sometimes choke and confuse my computer, and if they are long enough to attach, I probably won't have time to read them. I do not find time to read all essays that are sent, much less to respond to them. Nor do I read all the forwarded materials. Sorry about that. Spare me the commercial stuff!

Talk about a different world! Our grandsons here attend an elementary school where 84 students either speak no English or very little, and they are from 27 different national and linguistic backgrounds. Until college, I was never with a student that was not of a white, Protestant family – and very few in college.

J. C. Reed has spent most of the sixty years I have known him serving in Guatemala. Now, past eighty, he would like to begin turning his work (like his radio program) over to someone proficient in Spanish who can help train native preachers. You may write him at 17003 San Benito, Peten, Guatemala, Central America.

Online Community: Free In Christ. You could not reach the interactive discussion group that Vic has initiated using the URL I gave you. How could you expect me to copy such an URL perfectly? <mycomm/browse.asp?cid=32863>.

Vic adds this: Dear Community Member, Have you been frustrated trying to share a long message in our community discussion area? Well, now we can share files (word processing, spreadsheet, database, or small programs) in the Community. You can upload your sermon, class notes, or article in MS Word or RTF format so others can download it and enjoy. Let me know if you have any problem. <vic@freedomring.org> -Vic Phares.

May you have no greater worries in 1999 than I am having about the devastating Y2K problem that the alarmists are screaming and hollering about!

The Antichrist

From pulpits, television, and writings you are being treated to fantastic claims about that awesome and mysterious character, The Antichrist. His anticipated soon appearance is supposed to be an evidence of the imminent coming of Christ and the fulfillment of "end time prophecies." According to the sensationalists and alarmists, the collapse of our civilization to be brought by the Y2K problem may be the opening of the way for "The Antichrist"! Just one year to go! Some of those screamers seem to take a devilish delight in anticipating what is to happen to our sinful world.

Would you like to have all the authentic information that exists about the antichrist? Great! I can give it to you right

here, for through the Spirit, John gives us all that information in the quotations below. (All quotations from NIV)

*“Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the **antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.** They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? **It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist** – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:18-22).*

*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world”** (1 John 3:1-3).*

*“Many deceivers, who **do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh**, have gone out into the world. **Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.** Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the **teaching of Christ** does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this teaching**, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 7-11).*

There you have it all! Everything else you hear about the antichrist is commentary or pure speculation. John is clear enough that little commentary is in order, but you would not expect me to stop here without telling you what I think about it, would you? ☺ These quotations are being given in greater length in order to emphasize the setting and context in which John wrote them.

Although John’s words have been **preserved for** people of all times, they were not **addressed to** people of all times. They were written to further inform living disciples whom John had taught previously on the subject. They were living in the *last hour*, and the presence of many antichrists was evidence that it was the last hour. In spite of John’s plain declaration that **they** were living in the **last hour**, many modern teachers are contradicting John by saying **we** are living in the last hour. Was that last hour to stretch out for many centuries? Absurd! What twisting men will do, even as I have done to John’s words in the past, to uphold such a preconceived notion!

The apostle was not writing because they did not know the truth about this matter already, for he had already taught them. He was further warning against those who would deny that Jesus is the Christ – that he had come in the flesh as the Son of God. There were already plenty of those who were “against” Christ – antichrist – present among them in that last hour of Judaism before the *parousia*, the coming of Christ in vengeance against rejecting Israel. The Jewish rejecters

believed in God but not the Son. John told them they could not have God while denying the Son.

It is common to hear someone proposing to “test the spirits” by using prooftexts to argue against some debatable practice. Such an effort ignores the entire context. What was the test? It was whether or not the prophet acknowledged that Jesus the Messiah had come in the flesh from God. And what is *the teaching of Christ* in which they must continue in order to have both the Father and the Son? It was that Jesus was the Messiah in the flesh without whom they could not claim the Father. How totally inconceivable it is that this passage would be perverted into a prooftext against such things as hand-clapping or using an instrument while singing, singing during Communion, weekday Communion, or eating a meal in a “church building”. By perversion of this text, such practices have been declared to be as damning as the denial of both the Father and the Son!

Some claim to have an elite gift of the Spirit enabling them to “discern the spirits”. Such a power would serve no purpose in this instance, for even the most simple disciple can ask a teacher if he or she believes that Jesus came in the flesh, and then understand a *yes* or *no* answer. If he has not come in the flesh, there is no atonement for sin and, hence, no basis for our religion. Denial of the Son invalidates any approach to the Father.

While no believer in the Scriptures can deny that there were antichrists in John’s time indicating it was the last hour, two thousand years later, teachers are pointing to the coming of “The Antichrist”, a sort of *head honcho* antichrist. That is contrary to John’s plain teaching. *The antichrist* (singular) is a genre – a kind, a sort – of which there may be many. In a similar expression we may say, “The terrorist will destroy our country, and many terrorists are already working.” *The terrorist* is a genre – a kind, a sort – of which there may be many. Only speculation can make John refer to a certain man who would arise centuries or millennia later – still in the last hour!

Speculators, however, know no limits. It has been common for teachers to identify *The Antichrist* and the **man of sin, the man of lawlessness**, as the same person.. Who is that mysterious *lawless one*? Speculators have given you a plethora of choices: Judas, Simon the Sorcerer, Caligula and various other Roman emperors, Attila the Hun, Mohammed, Napoleon, Hitler, Gorbachov, Saddam Hussein, and the front runner in the contest – the popes (papacy). And that is just the short list!

What do the Scriptures say about the man of sin, or man of lawlessness? Paul told the Thessalonian disciples about him (2 Thes. 2:1-12): *“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our** being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.**”*

*“Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And **now** we know what **is holding him back**, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the **secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be***

revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. Etc.”.

No point is to be gained by identifying the antichrist as the man of lawlessness. Assuredly, the man of lawlessness would be an antichrist, for he opposed both Christ and God. This related to the coming of Christ, the *parousia*. Some thought that the day of the Lord had already come and they had missed out on it. Was the *parousia* to involve the return of Jesus in the flesh, a physical resurrection of all, the destruction of the elements of this universe, and all the other dramatic physical manifestations that present-day teachers vividly describe to us? Then how in the world could the disciples in Thessalonica have thought that all that had already happened? Wouldn't we expect that Paul would have replied like this: "You foolish people, can't you see that the universe is still operating as usual and those things have not happened?" Those physical manifestations were not what Paul had told them to look for at the coming of Christ (v. 5). He and other writers had used cataclysmic language familiar to the Hebrew people to picture the religious and political upheaval which was approaching. The spiritual kingdom was to replace the earthly, national kingdom.

Paul wrote years before John wrote. He stated that the coming of the Lord would not be until the *rebellion* occurred. Other translations have used *falling away* instead of *rebellion*. From that we concluded that he referred to an apostasy or obliteration of the church. That was in spite of Daniel's declaration that it would be a kingdom "which shall never be destroyed ... and it will stand forever" (Dan. 2:44), and the encouragement of the disciples to receive that unshakable kingdom confirmed by the *parousia* (Heb. 12). Paul also wrote to Timothy later "that in later times some will abandon the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1). **Some** would fall away, but that by no means indicates that **most** or **all** would.

For most of my career I taught lessons on the "falling away and the restoration" characterizing the Church of Christ as a restoration of the original church. The church was never destroyed. Jesus was not defeated. The King has continued to reign. So, **the concept of restoration of an apostate church is ill-advised.**

This man of lawlessness, though denying the Christ and defying God and the Law of Moses, would be a political leader of rebellion against Rome. Already there had been pockets of rebellion. This leader was gaining power as Paul wrote, even though still restrained, and he would eventually instigate the **rebellion** (a proper meaning of the word) of the Jews against Roman rule. Through this, God would bring destruction to that leader, their temple, their city, their nation, and Judaism in general by means of the Roman army.

Please notice that Paul uses verbs in the present tense in verse 5: *opposes, exalts, is, sets*. **He was writing to them in their generation rather than to us in this century.** Just as John later declared that the antichrists were already at work in destroying belief in Jesus among them, Paul had previously declared that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" in the political area. Paul was saying "**not yet, but it is developing**", and later John was saying "**The antichrists are here! It is the last hour!**"

Jesus gave some sign for them to look for as evidence of his being at their very gates. Then he promised, "*I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*" Then he explained, "*No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in*

heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matt. 24:34-36). The day and hour was unrevealed then, but more than thirty years later, John could declare, "*It is the last hour!*" (From Josephus' history, John Bray has identified a historical character of that time by name in a most believable manner. For a copy of his 45-page booklet, *The Man of Sin*, send \$2 to him at P O Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804.)

So, even if you think "The Antichrist" and the "Man of Lawlessness" are both the same person, have no fear, for you live nineteen hundred years too late to be affected by either or both.

It is amazing that evangelicals who loudly proclaim belief in the inerrancy of the Bible will argue that some of its writers were mistaken when they taught the imminent return of Christ and the consummation of the age in their generation. If they told their generation that those things were imminent while knowing that centuries would pass before their fulfillment, then they were deceptive. If God allowed his inspired writers to give those hearers a wrong impression, he is not to be trusted. Some claim that Jesus came to set up his kingdom, but because of rejection, he was thwarted from his plan so that he must come back to do it. If Jesus could be defeated and his writers were deceived or deceiving, how can we trust Jesus or his writers further?

It is reassuring to know that our eternal welfare is not dependent on having the correct answers about the antichrists and the man of lawlessness. If, however, we let such questions divide us, dim our realization of the presence of Jesus in our lives now, or divert us from evangelism and edification by emphasis of our speculations, we have let them become a pitfall.

Now, instead of imploring, "Lord, come quickly," as that generation did, we can thank him for his abiding presence with us. []

Edward Fudge's Great Books

Questions And Answers may not be a "grabbing" title for a book – unless you learn that the answers are given by Edward Fudge. He answers questions daily on the internet in his "**gracEmail**" column, and he never parrots a traditional answer. He is a rare student of the Scriptures, a recognized scholar, and an honest investigator who writes so we pew-people can understand. In 296 pages he answers 150 questions sent by readers. They concern God, Jesus, Grace, Sin and Sanctification, Faith and Works, Baptism, Bible and Hermeneutics, Church, Worship, Holy Spirit, Election and Security, Life Issues, and End Times.

These rare insights are good to have for future reference and study. You may order from me for \$12.00 plus postage.

The Fire That Consumes. Hell, according to traditional belief, is a place of unending conscious torment inflicted on the damned. Edward Fudge challenges that popular assumption. Putting his emphasis squarely on the Scriptural evidence rather than on extra-biblical or philosophical considerations, he analyzes every relevant reference in the New Testament as well as passages in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and other inter-testamental writings. While affirming the resurrection of both saint and sinner, he makes the convincing case for conditional immortality.

This 226 page paperback has much scholarly work but Edward has done well in simplifying it for popular reading.

Good for your peace of mind. Good for the church library. The price jumped with this printing! \$17.00 plus postage.

Beyond The Sacred Page. Can we believe that God is as alive, powerful and near us today as He was in Biblical times? This book presents Edward Fudge's witness to a multitude of ways God wondrously directs those who seek His personal guidance. It is his personal story. It grips you quickly and makes it hard to put it down once you start reading it. It makes you conscious of God's work in your life. 183-page paperback. \$9.00 plus postage.

(Orders of \$25.00 postpaid. If less, please add \$1.50.)

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

I have read your *Free In Christ* book many times and each time it helps me even more. I am involved in a growing congregation that is beginning to embrace many of the concepts that you so eloquently discuss in your book. I have ordered 8 more books that I intend to share with those I feel could benefit from it and help the church continue to grow. Thank you for the opportunity to write to you and to gain access to your books. -GA.

I am a college student at (University) and my major is Bible. Your book *Free In Christ* has changed my life and opened my heart. I used to be torn with legalism, but now I am happy and free. Praise God for your work. I also read Ketcherside's *The Twisted Scriptures*, and all I have to say is WOW! -AL.

Thanks again for your faithfulness in all that you do for our benefit. I have learned so much from you. I will always treasure that. It's an awesome, humbling, breath-taking, and joyous moment when we truly begin to focus on and understand God's love for us. When I finally started to understand what Paul was saying in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" When I started seeing God as my Father, on my side, in my cheering section say, "Yes, you can do it! We'll do it together! I'll help you." And Jesus as our Big Brother interceding for us with the same kind of help. What a difference my view of life became. You, my brother, had a big hand in helping me to see this. -(signed by a man imprisoned in body but free in spirit.)

I wanted to report to you that today was the first Sunday in our new church facility for Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio. The service was attended by app. 3200 souls gathered to worship our Lord. -Thomas Brite, S.A., TX

Being an elder in the Church of Christ and reading your material for the past ten years has been both enlightening and frustrating. I find very few that are willing to study and think for themselves. Most are blind followers of previous teachings. We claim to be people who follow and stand upon the Bible. In 20 years with seven congregations, I have only found a few who are willing to study and change their beliefs if and when the Bible proves to teach something different from their current belief. Thank God for the few! -TX.

I, as so many others, was deeply moved by your eloquent tribute to your sweet Lea and am thankful for this opportunity to tell you how much the two of you have meant to me and my family since our paths crossed several years ago.

Having been reared in the "anti-orphan home/anti-cooperation" movement during the 1950s, I shall never forget that night I was given my first copy of *Free In Christ*. I read all night, then called you the next morning and you graciously spent almost two hours on the telephone with me. For many years I had used my own little slogan: "Real, SAVING TRUTH has nothing to fear from honest questions."

That night of reading made me realize how truly tradition-bound we really are! I've since adopted another saying that I thank our Lord for allowing me to live long enough to share with others. It is: "I am totally committed to our concept of being Christians only, but it is the most intellectually arrogant thing in the world for a group of Christians in the southern part of the United States to think that they are the first people since the apostles to understand the truth and whose faith is valid." May God help us – and forgive us – for those whom we have tried to shut out of His kingdom. -Lanier Stevens, Madisonville, TX. [I knew Lanier's father, Roy, and his brother, Eldred. A family of preachers. Lanier has a loving heart and a great family. Perhaps you have heard his "*Sounds of Glory*" quartet.]

Thanks for sticking your neck out and giving us something to chew on. I have some friends that have the preterist eschatologic beliefs and I never quite understood why. Now I can look it up for myself. Thanks. <barefoot@accutek.com>.

A friend gave me *Free In Christ* recently. I love it and have read it twice and passed it on to two others. I am very anxious to read the others that I have ordered. Bless you in your good work. -Charleston, WV

Thank you for putting together this site. It is on my "favorites" list, for sure! -David Grogan, Dallas. [Vic Phares gets the credit for operating the site. A true partner!]

I appreciate what you are doing in promoting unity and breaking down the walls of sectarianism in the church. I attended the 16th Annual Restoration Forum in Nashville last week, and was greatly blessed by it – in fact it was healing for me. It was the first I had the pleasure to attend. I understand that the 2001 forum will be in your neck-of-the-woods – Portland, Oregon again. I grew up in the non-instrumental Churches of Christ but for the last three years have been meeting with the saints at Cole Community Church here in Boise. May God continue to bless your life, family, and ministry. -ID.

It's great to see this site! I've been using its literature for several months now, but I decided to let you know that today (just for encouragement, I guess). You gave me a free book of yours in Tulsa (*Free In Christ*), and since I read it, I've been hooked. I'm a young traveling minister trying to make it through college, and not every church where I go has appreciated my doctrine (the notion that someone outside of "the church" might actually make it to heaven). Right now, everything is looking fantastic for me. I'll soon have a job with a small church of believers who have very similar views to you and me. I think I can really help them grow – I'll be borrowing a lot of your material! Thank you so much for such a useful site. -signed.

I would like to wish you a happy birthday this month. I cannot possibly express to you the blessings I've received through your newsletters. May God continue to bless you! -RL, <Tullkatz@webtv.net>.

In the last few years I have been confused thinking there is something wrong with me, since in my heart I challenge many of the doctrines of the "one true church." My wife and I have lost several friends when we tried to share some of our findings with them. They think we are "Satan's messengers." Recently someone gave me a book (*Free In Christ*). I was amazed at the fact that what I thought I was "discovering," has already been taught by other brethren such as you. After having read most of the material on *Freedom's Ring* web page, I sure thank you for your hard work in writing

and sharing with others your insight concerning the real discipleship motivated by God's love. -ML, El Paso, TX.

Please send 20 *Free In Christ* if you have them. We are giving them to people still tied to legalism as well as those who are beginning to see a way out. Thank you for all you do, also for the lovely tribute to your wife. We rejoice in our risen Lord and thank God for voices like yours. -Jasper, AR.

Thanks for sharing in "*Fourscore*". Our experiences and thinking are very much alike. Probably the former is the cause of the latter. You are older though. Ha! -Jim Albert, CA.

Cecil, I don't know much about you, but am glad to see something like this in the COC. I went to Columbia Christian College from 1981 to 1985. Great job with your page! -Tim Phillips, Memphis, TN.

God led me to this web site by getting me in touch with Cecil Hook. I read *Free In Christ* in Alaska, and needed some extras to share. So through a line of people I found and talked to him, and was told by Cecil that he has a web page. It is time that we unite as a people in whatever country and proudly say we are God's Children. Bless all of you. -Roxanne Barrilleaux, Horseshoe Bay, TX.

I enjoyed your book and would love to hear more of the discussions in the RM. -Eric Bailey, Thunder Bay, ON.

My roots are in the Restoration Movement. I no longer blindly accept the teachings I learned as a young man and am searching to make my relationship with Christ a personal one. I would love to find a group with similar roots and a sincere desire to serve the Father with no manmade restrictions in Southwest Missouri. -Steve Elkins, Springfield, MO. <s-elkins@usa.net>.

I am a United Methodist preacher. Praise the Lord. Keep up the good work. I will be praying for you. -C. H., KY.

Having been raised in a traditionally legalistic Church of Christ in Arkansas, your book was a real blessing to me and started me on a search for more enlightenment and acceptance of other Christians, no matter what their particular flavor. I appreciate your work and have loaned my book and purchased a few for some people over the years. -Barry Bradley, Hot Springs, AR.

I am a pastor who once was overseer for a faith movement org. God had different plans and directed me to the message of Grace. So I found your booklet, "the Grace of God", very informative. Thank you! -Pastor Roxy Nolin, Calgary, Alberta.

Cecil, my Brother. I finally hooked up to your Web page, and I find it quite interesting. But what's new? I've been reading and digesting your material for years. You and I are on the same spiritual wave length. I don't think we're biological brothers (I'm much taller than you!), but we surely are spiritual brothers. And that is because we have the same Father, and our blood line flows directly to Jesus! -Buff Scott, Phoenix. [Buff publishes *Reformation Rumbings* by email weekly. Free. <TheReformer@inficad.com>]

It is hard to kick against the pricks. -H. A. (Buster) Dobbs.

Our friends gave us a copy of *Free In Christ* and we loved it and are looking forward to reading your other books which we just ordered this week. God bless you in your ministry. -Janeen & Joe Masker, Charleston, WV.

I saw your listing and simply wanted to say Agape and Shalom. I appreciate your long and fruitful ministry in "freedom's" cause. -Roy Key, Rogers, AR.

It's been years since I've seen you and I had just about given up ever finding any of those who have had such impact on my life. I read your books to keep me going. Thanks. It's good to find old friends. -Mike Foster, Spanaway, WA.

I am doing a speech of doctor-assisted suicides, and I found your web-page VERY helpful. I really appreciate it. Thank you and keep up the good work. -Clair Snider, Grayslake, IL.

Wonderful website. You are a blessing! May the Church repent from her Babylonian system and return to the New Testament pattern and be the spotless bride of Christ. - Lodi, Republic of South Africa

Great discussion – well reasoned and logical in terms of both arguments and conclusions (important to a 3rd (+) generation Lockean CofC-er like me and many of my ilk). It's great when you see someone else present a well-presented discussion that matches so closely your own theology. -KB

I have had the pleasure of reading three of your books several years ago. I am a member of a church of Christ (instrumental) in Virginia. Your books helped free me from a divisional attitude that kept me from fellowshipping others even in my own church. -Waynesboro, VA.

I bookmarked your page. It looks great. -GB, San Lorenzo, CA.

Greetings from dear old New Jersey. This is just one of several visits downloading different articles and books. This visit was to obtain a book for a Christian friend who knew Carl Ketcherside when she was a young woman in Missouri. Thanks so much for making this available. -Curtis Stamps, Whippany, NJ.

You need never apologize for "making it such a platitudinous rambling." I love and cherish your words of wisdom. They are like soothing waters to the soul. In this time of deepening darkness, your voice shines brighter every day. I know that our Lord is pleased. I thank the Lord, and you for your faithfulness. <jford@fortwayne.infi.net>

Very interesting. I have battled legalism for a number of years. The key is to teach more from the gospels and emphasize Christ in the epistles. -Jerry Dean, Gold Beach, OR.

Are you under the impression that one is not free in Christ who believes the New Testament allows only one church, and that it must follow strictly the New Testament pattern in all things? Do you think one is not free in Christ who believes there is an exclusive pattern for the church Jesus promised he would build? Pardon me for saying this, but it seems to me as you enjoy less freedom in Christ, because of your loose and liberal views of his word. There is a passage that comes to my mind: "While they promise liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19). -drs, KY.

This week's *Freedom's Ring* was very comforting to me, as you expressed much that I feel, such as my doubts and questioning. Thanks for your refreshing honesty. -SSG Chris.

Dear brother in Christ, I really appreciate your web site as I was involved with the Worldwide Church of God when

it was a cult! God bless you! -Dennis Stigliano, Newington, CT.

Mr. Hook, Where have you been all my life?!!! It was only through the wonderful workings of God in my life that a friend recommended your books. Having grown up in the Church of Christ and "done many wonderful works in my lifetime (been a Christian 22 years)," it has only been in the past year that I have found Christ, or should I say *Freedom in Christ*? I have read *Free In Christ* out loud with my wife and we are beginning another one of your books shortly. My heart and soul hurt for so long. I knew something was wrong. I tried to put my thoughts into words and it just never came out right (of just sounded off the wall). You have captured and organized many of my thoughts and validated my beliefs. May God continue to bless you and your family. God has definitely used you as a tool in my family's life. -Glynn Dilbeck, Gallatin, TN <gdilbeck@juno.com>.

started me to rethinking my position on other traditions I had been brought up in until I discovered the freedom that is in Christ and is taught in His word. The last few years have been a real pleasure studying and serving the Lord, and I am still growing. <Papaw12@aol.com>

Great work, Cecil! You are affecting change in the restoration movement. Take a look at my site. I think you'll find fresh grace-centered thought and teaching for the Christian who is navigating the changes taking place in our heritage. - Fred Peatross, Huntington, WV <NUCManchh@aol.com>

I am writing to ask you to please send your newsletter via regular mail to my son. Thank you, you dear sweet man. You will never know what a blessing you are. - <jjohn123@earthlink.net>.

You have enriched the lives of our family and thousands of other people through the years, and I feel that I know you. <jsgreeks@swbell.net>.

I found your site by searching for a definition of the word *legalsim*. It is refreshing to know you. God bless! - Mixael, Orlando, FL, <NIBC373@aol.com>

I am a man who feels in his heart that he has plumbed the depths of life to seek the truth. I don't lie, and make every effort – and struggle even now – to tell the truth to himself, and others. Not MY version of the truth, but what I have determined (with the Bible as my standard) to be truth, no matter how pleasant or unpleasant it may be. This letter you wrote (FR 33: Fourscore) is one of the most concentrated forms of truth I think I have ever read in one place, with the Bible being the exception. -<jjames45@bellsouth.net>

Cecil, thanks for the information in *Free In Christ*. My wife and I enjoy it to the max. I have already given it to someone else and am waiting on the ones I ordered from you. - Odessa, TX.

I have been struggling with legalism for 6 years now. I left the ministry in frustration and disbelief for not being able to serve God to the best of my ability. Of course this was all based on selfishness. I always asked God to show me his will but in reality he had to abide by my guidelines. I put restriction on what God can do for me. It is only now that I am coming to know God's true grace. Your web site is a great help and I appreciate your efforts for the wandering ones who are standing on the wayside in desperation and confusion in the Christian faith. Again, Thank you. <kenneth@ndak.net>

Dear Bro. Hook, I always enjoy your writings and appreciate all the good you have done in stirring my mind to fresh thinking. I grew up in the non-class element of the church of Christ, and that was the first change I made. That