

FREEDOM'S RING

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

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Aims and Observations

It is true that, if you don't know where you are going, you don't know if you are on the right road, and you will not know when you get there.

That realization causes me to reexamine my aims and to restate them all along to be sure that they are still evident in my writing. I realize that, in pursuit of bigger game, at times I may be distracted to chase some rabbits of different colors. Some subjects that I touch on are in that category, but most of them are related in some way to my main objective.

My first book, *Free In Christ*, was published primarily as an effort to lead my people in the Church of Christ from our entanglement in legalism into freedom in Christ offered through grace. It challenges the traditional interpretations and practices which have made us a pitifully, tragically divided movement. I have continued on that course with a few deviations. In gaining your loyal readership, my subordinate intention is to make sure that, when you see my name on an article, you will expect to find a new viewpoint or challenging thought. I cannot claim to have done that in every instance.

I still urge any who bother to read my material to begin with my book, *Free In Christ*, and then read my other books in the order written before reading the material of my newsletters. Otherwise, your understanding of my current expressions will be based on your previous concepts instead of mine. A free copy of the first book can be supplied for that purpose.

My extended purpose is to promote the recognition of unity of those who relate to God in Christ. Paul explained that "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself..." (2 Cor. 5:18). All the saved are in God through Christ. The reconciled ones comprise his *ecclesia*, his congregation, church, assembly. This is accomplished by relationship rather than doctrinal agreement in all things. It is individuals, not churches (either sectarian, *true*, *loyal*, or otherwise) who comprise that group. Can one reject, and dissociate from, others in Christ without destroying his own relationship?

The unity with one another is neither brought about nor maintained by agreement on all doctrinal issues. I have discussed with you many points on which believers disagree, not intending to cause you to override your convictions, but encouraging you to accept fellow disciples in spite of differing understandings and practices.

Almost two centuries ago Presbyterians, Barton W. Stone and Thomas Campbell with his brilliant son, Alexander, unknown to each other at the time, began working to break down the walls of separation among their Presbyterian factions. Their ideal of unity gained growing favor among Christians in various sectarian bodies. Their aim was not to *restore* a sup-

posedly extinct universal church, to start a "one true church," or to unite sectarian groups into one new church, but it was for disciples of Christ to accept the reconciled ones who were in the various churches. They wanted Christians in the separated bodies to be *Christians only* while making no claim of being the *only Christians*.

Thomas Campbell's perception of unity has not been comprehended by many who think they pursue his aims. In his famous *Declaration and Address*, he stated: "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct." Since God intentionally brings all the saved together in Christ, universal oneness is an essential quality of the group constituting his redeemed. The universal body cannot be divided into two or more churches. Yes, exclusive factions may organize and identify themselves separately, but if there are any reconciled individuals in the groups, they are still in the one, universal body.

Those in the universal church may assemble and serve locally in groups with different traditions, understandings, and practices so long as they do not reject others whose practices may differ. Each individual and group must respect the discipleship of others even as they themselves wish to be respected. Disciples may work separately due to scruples, culture, race, or location without being opposed to each other. Since the universal body of believers has no name, no group should think its chosen name gives them favor with God.

Each disciple, and every organized group of them, has serious flaws, some more obvious and damaging than others. If we reject all who have imperfections, then we must reject all disciples, and we must expect to be rejected by all others. In a physical family, every member is less than perfect in all respects, but they are no less parts of the same family. They are sisters and brothers because of parentage rather than perfection. They learn to live together in spite of flaws and defects. Being antagonistic, critical, and abusive of each other does not change their relationship in the family but it only emphasizes the differences instead of cultivating loving forbearance.

My writings have been less devotional and inspirational and more doctrinal. In order to promote unity, I have felt the need of dealing with the doctrinal stance that has made us factious. So I have dealt with our legalistic approach to understanding. Thinking the New Covenant writings are a code of law legislating divine patterns for all that pertains to discipleship, we have focused on forms more than relationship. There are constant divisive debates over what the law specifies and how the pattern is maintained. That requires continued

effort to restore the vaguely identified authorized pattern. That approach is a proven system for division.

Afraid of Freedom

In view of this, my efforts have been to direct our attention to the Covenant of Grace in contrast to a perceived covenant of law. And it becomes a whole new ball game. Freedom is in grace, not law. Why are we so enslaved to law and so afraid of freedom?

My influence has been limited. I entertain no delusions of self-importance. Yet, from my limited perspective, I have sufficient reason for optimism. The response that I have received from the *pew people* since *Free In Christ* was published late in 1984 has changed drastically. While our congregational structures are still guarded zealously in most places by traditional legalists, there is a more Christ-centered message being preached. Disciples have grown tired of spiritually debilitating doctrinal argumentation which holds us to formulas and rituals. They want a family relationship that gives them strength for daily life and a positive interaction with all other believers. The old "We are right and you are wrong" attitude is fading due to the brighter realization that our righteousness is a gift rather than our being right, or *more nearly right*, on everything.

In the few years since my first book was published, a good number of men much more qualified than I have made great material available. Their works are receiving attention from spiritually hungry disciples. Our sectarian and denominational status is being recognized and remedied.

Our people are also developing courage to read challenges to other of our identifying distinctions such as instrumental music, the role of women, marriage and divorce issues, patternism, and the work of the Holy Spirit today. Robert Rowland's "*I Permit Not A Woman...*" *To Remain Shackled* is being read widely. So have Edward Fudge's *Beyond the Sacred Page*, concerning the working of God in our lives, and *The Fire That Consumes*, which questions unconditional immortality and unending conscious torment inflicted on the damned in hell.

Various of our splinter groups resist any change because they think their particular group has restored the "one, true church" in its pristine form. So they decry any who would reform as **change agents** who are trying change God's "original pattern." There is a disconcerting militancy remaining among these disciples. So we have a long way to go yet.

For years I wished to be able to attend a session of *Restoration Forum*, an annual gathering of heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement to discuss unity among us. Several years ago I had that opportunity when it was hosted by the Skillman Avenue Church of Christ in Dallas. With all the Churches of Christ, Christian Churches (Independent), and Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in the metropolitan area, where would they find a place big enough for such a meeting? Texas Stadium, maybe? Not exactly! I think the auxiliary chapel of the Skillman building could have held us all!

What does that say about our interest in unity? No, attendance was not the proof or disproof of an interest in unity, but wouldn't just a mild interest have filled the building? Paul's urging to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) was interpreted by our action as "make little effort."

Incidentally, in May I received an unsolicited copy of the first issue of **Bartimaeus**. It explains: "*Bartimaeus* is a periodic newsletter for the promotion of dialogue between Roman Catholic Christians and Christians of the Churches of Christ. For information: Editors: Rev. Benjamin F. Luther, 6705 Old

Highway 45, Paducah, KY 42003 or Bruce Sullivan, 8257 Bunnell Crossing Rd., Hardyville, Ky 42746. Phone: (502) 554-3810. This newsletter is subscription free." The main article was a review of Richard T. Hughes' *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America*." The review was an honest and conciliatory outreach. Where will it go and what can it accomplish? Who knows? You may want to be in on it. If so, contact them.

The question is not whether various churches will unite by working out some sort of creedal agreement. Our freedom as individual disciples will not allow any sort of organized system to deliver us as a group. Individuals, however, have the responsibility of erasing needless barriers of fellowship person-by-person. Because someone serves in a congregation with sectarian minded people does not mean that the individual exhibits a sectarian attitude.

In so many of our local groups the rejecting, sectarian attitude is so developed that any suggestion of recognition of, or working with, disciples of other groups is unthinkable! Just recently I received the report of a preacher being dismissed immediately, and area congregations were warned of him, because he conceded that some in other churches might be saved.

Yet, factionalism is receding, our people are more unity minded, and we are centering around Christ more than around church systems

I will conclude this with some challenges. Please restudy the basis of unity for yourself and erase any erroneously erected barriers. Remember, the party spirit is a work of the flesh. Study these matters with other individuals. Feed them literature that emphasizes the correct basis for unity. In time, encourage congregational restudy. A brighter world will come into view! []

Adulterating Marriage

The concept of *adultery* or *adulteration* is not just related to religion. In common usage, to adulterate means to corrupt, debase, or make impure by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance. We have federal agencies to protect the public against the adulteration of our food and drugs. The scriptures give us guidelines to prevent adulteration of marriages.

While it is true that a person may become the adulterer, and sexual relations outside of marriage by a married person may be the adulterant, the thing that is adulterated is the marriage itself. Our invented term "living in adultery" is not found in the scriptures. Only the Lord knows, however, how many persons are unknowingly in an adulterated marriage because of the secret affairs of their spouses. Who will contend that such an innocent mate would be condemned because of it?

Even if a woman knows her husband has adulterated their marriage, there is no law or reason demanding that she divorce him. If he repents, asks for forgiveness, and is forgiven, he is no longer an adulterer and their marriage is pure again (Consider 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous" (Heb.13:4). While we recognize that marriage without love and trust is defective, we also know that without sexuality there would be no marriage. It is the nature God put within us to bring about the propagation of the race and to help

hold the family unit together for the nurturing and protection of the offspring. So sexual activity by a marriage partner outside the marriage corrupts and destroys the purity and purpose of God's happy arrangement.

Paul certainly emphasized the love that should exist between husband and wife, but he also recognized their sexual needs. "But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" but he did not add "and each homosexual person should have his/her own same-sex partner" (1 Cor. 7:2). Then he further advises husbands and wives to respect conjugal rights.

Although homosexual activity is condemned in the scriptures, same-sex partners do not commit adultery for there is no marriage to adulterate. Their sexual activities are not for procreation or for the maintaining of the nurturing situation for their offspring, hence there can be no valid marriage. The same can be said of heterosexual persons living together out of wedlock.

Adulterine children are those born of adultery, though it is not "politically correct" to use any descriptive distinction of them in our licentious society. Paul corrected an evident misconception among some Corinthian disciples, explaining, "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy" (7:14). For a believer to have children with an unbelieving spouse was not adultery, nor did it produce adulterine children. Both the marriage and the children were consecrated / holy.

Throughout the centuries, the sincerest of scholars have wrestled with some of Jesus' statements regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Who can claim to have deciphered everything correctly? In one of the more difficult passages Jesus states, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt. 5:31f). We must question the possibility that the action of a husband can make his wife a sinner. Jesus was commenting on Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which specifically allowed a divorced woman to be remarried, but she could not later return to her first husband because she had been *defiled* by his action. Her marriage with the first husband had been adulterated but not so with the second. It seems that she had been made the victim of adulteration rather than bearing the guilt of it. But that demands scholarly textual criticism and interpretation for which I have no qualification.

There is a more feasible approach to understanding Jesus' statements, however, in my less enlightened judgment. Jesus was dealing with their legal code of law, the Law of Moses, and their Talmudic interpretations. In this very setting, Jesus declared that he was not changing the Law of Moses (Matt. 5:17-20). We are not under that legal code for justification or for continued sanctification, for we are under a Covenant of Grace rather than the Covenant of Law. Yet, we have consistently tried to regulate marriage relationships under the covenant of grace by precepts of a code of law!

We have been known to argue properly that we are not under the Law of Moses and then proceed to judge our marriages by it. To those who would bind the Law upon disciples, Peter asked, "Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a **yoke** upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). Why bind that yoke when Jesus promised, "For my **yoke** is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30)?

Jesus Not Quoted by Paul

This realization becomes stronger when we consider that none of the writers of the Epistles quote Jesus' words when they write about marriage. We look to 1 Corinthians 7 for the most comprehensive apostolic discussion of the subject, and there Paul neither mentions Jesus' teachings in the Gospels nor uses the term "adultery!" He does not lay down the same restrictions and stipulations taught by Jesus and the Law.

Our marriage relationships are not governed by a legal code of requirements but by higher principles of love, moral ethics, honor, trust, and commitment. Abandonment of either of these in the marriage relationship spoils the purity and sanctity of a marriage. Consider the "deadbeat dad" who abandons his family. "If any does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). Is a sexual infraction of the husband a greater sin than denial of the faith? Has not the absentee father destroyed his marriage even as adultery would? Is the man who habitually beats his wife or constantly demeans her on better terms than the adulterer? Are those marital relations devoid of love, morality, and commitment -- the elements that constitute marriage -- still sanctified marriages? There can be unions that fulfill none of the purposes of marriage. Does not grace offer a key to unlock the dungeon of hopeless marriages, or is a wife compelled for a lifetime to "love, honor, and submit" to the man who gave her all the promises but turned out to be a ruthless tyrant?

Adultery may take on a different character in such cases. A breach of spiritual relationship with God is referred to as adultery (See Jas. 4:4; Ezek. 16:15; Matt. 15:19; 16:4; Mark 8:38; 2 Pet. 2:14). Since our marriage is based on love and commitment instead of legal statute, it is well to ponder if the concept of adultery is wider than just sexual infractions.

Loopholes are sought in law. Our president demonstrated the hypocrisy of seeking loopholes in legal definitions. Although it is not given as a just cause for divorce, Jesus indicated that adultery can be in the heart without accompanying action. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27). The adulterant is in the man's intention though not yet acted upon.

While we are here, let us look at this abused passage more closely. These words have been used to induce guilt where Jesus did not intend it. Because lust is defined as a strong desire, and every normal youth and man is attracted strongly to females, sincere men of all ages have been made to feel unavoidable guilt. Without strong sexual attraction, a man is not likely ever to marry. But let us look at Jesus' words and meaning.

Lust and **covet** are translated from the same word. It means a strong desire of any kind, either good or bad. According to the judgment of translators, the word **aner** is rendered **man** or **husband**, and **gune** is rendered **woman** or **wife**. These are the words Jesus used.

He says there is adultery, not fornication, in the heart. Married people commit adultery whereas sexual activity by two unmarried persons is generally called fornication. So, either the man who is lusting or the woman he is looking at, or both, are married. Jesus was actually only reinforcing the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exo.20:17). That had nothing to do with a youth looking over the prospective dates or finding one to be sexually appealing. Jesus was saying that in coveting / lusting for another man's wife / woman, the plans for adulterating one or two marriages were in his mind already. The man and woman involved could

adulterate two marriages in one act. However, since the Seventh Commandment had already stated, "You shall not commit adultery" (20:14), the Tenth probably anticipates marriage of the two involved.

Luke records Jesus' words, "Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery" (Luke 16:18). How could he say that when he had already given the permissive "except for fornication" clause? It is commonly understood in our speaking, that when a second action is coupled with a former one, the second action indicates the purpose of the first. To illustrate: "I went to the bank and deposited my check." *And* couples two actions with the second action stating the purpose of the first one. So we understand it as "I went to the bank *in order to* deposit my check." That is a very common usage, and evidently it was used by Jesus in the above quotation. It should be understood, "Every one who divorces his wife *in order to* marry another." His looking was more than a gawking or fantasizing but evidently it was a developed intention to take the woman. So he divorces his wife in order to marry the coveted woman.

Don't try to outline this piece for I have followed none. Don't accept my thoughts as dogmatic expressions. I mean to encourage further study. I would like to relieve some of the doubts, uncertainties, and paralyzing fears while remaining true to the Word. I want you to consider that the holiness / sanctity of marriage is based on the higher principles of love, honor, and commitment rather than upon a legal contract.

For those who may have been sentenced to doom and hopelessness by well-meaning brethren, I point to the hope Paul offered those formerly mired in adulterous relationships, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

(For more on the subject see *Freedom's Ring, #21 and #22.*) []

HOOK'S POINTS

Is God concerned with our calendar? Alarmists and enthusiasts predict events of great magnitude with the coming of the new millennium. But which calendar would God follow? At the beginning of the next year the Jewish calendar will be 5767; Chinese 4698; Zoroastrian 2390; and Islamic 1421. And if we count from the birth of Jesus, the new millennium began in 1996. Also, our new millennium will begin with 2001, not 2000. The colorful balloons of the money-grabbing prophets are going to start popping soon.

That's all about as smart as belief in visits from aliens from outer space. If some other creatures were intelligent enough to make their way to our planet, don't you think they would check out our civilization, gather all sorts of data, collect artifacts, and communicate with our scientists and leaders?

WOW!! Bob West's messages on the internet through his cartoon character, *Theophilus*, is getting about a thousand hits per day. Linked from our site.

Television and movies have their agendas. There is studied purpose behind all productions, so they try to make them attractive and entertaining to get you suckered into watching. *Noah's Ark!!!* What a farce as far as presenting a Biblical account! It was ridiculous as far as believability goes. So that must be the purpose of the production – to further undermine the veracity of the Bible.

Who said that English is a simple language? The letters *ough* can be pronounced in eight different ways, as in this

sentence: "A rough-coated dough-faced plough-man strode through the streets of Scarborough, coughing and hiccoughing thoughtfully." (Borrowed). If that seems complicated, just think how many different tedious doctrinal interpretations are based on such a "simple" statement as: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Not All That Simple (Continued)

3. ADAM AND EVE IN EDEN

In your earliest childhood, if you were in Bible classes, you were impressed with the delightful, though disappointing, account of the creation of Adam and Eve and their experiences in the Garden of Eden. Most believers have accepted that brief and simple account without hesitation, not because they could explain all its details, but just because it is recorded in the Bible. Such faith is to be commended.

Should such faith, however, deter us from asking questions and cause us to ignore facts that we might not have considered before? There seems to be a prevailing fear that we will lose our simple faith if we probe more deeply. We begin this review of the account of Adam and Eve with the admission that ***it is not all that simple.***

The name of Adam is found fourteen times in the first five chapters of Genesis. His name is listed in records of genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:1, in Luke 3:38, and Jude 14. Paul is the only writer who connects him with theology (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Eve's name is used twice in Genesis and twice in the New Covenant scriptures.

Since neither Adam nor Eve is mentioned in connection with the promise to Abraham, with the Law of Moses, by the prophets, or by Jesus, that is a sufficient cause to question how the couple fits into Jewish theology.

The promise to Abraham, the Law of Moses, the prophets, and Jesus all related to the sinful nature of mankind. The narrative of Eden deals with sin more definitely than with biology or scientific origins. Could it be that the Jews regarded the account as a divinely approved allegory dealing with the human predicament without arguing its historicity? Is the account to be interpreted literally, or does it contain figurative representations designed to accommodate our limited understanding?

Before you form a posse to dispatch me, please consider the questions to be raised in this essay. If you reject the evidences presented and continue to hold traditional views, that is your prerogative; however, those who may hold a different view may not have left the faith necessarily. After a candid appraisal, you may have to agree that, whichever view you hold, ***it is not all that simple!***

Even among the more conservative students, I judge that most do not think that a literal snake tempted Eve. A literal snake cannot reason, know the will of God, know human language and converse in it without even having a voice or voice box or ears with which to hear. Is the snake really more subtle, cunning, or ingenious than all other wild creatures? A snake does not eat dust. The figurative use of *serpent* is verified in Scripture as "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). So who is to insist that all the Genesis account is literal?

Also, I presume that you will all agree that, when it is stated that Adam was made of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7; 3:19; See Ecc. 12:7), the composition included more than literal dust. We, too, are created of dust but a great part of our bodies is water and minerals. He forms us of "dust" beginning in our mother's womb and continues by what we consume the rest of our lives. His creation of our bodies is by stages and a process over a period of time. So we allow for accommodative language detailing this part of the narrative and have no hangup about it being literal. The "dust" pertains to all that is earthly in us.

When a baby is born, it acts by instincts rather than reason and understanding, for those faculties are developed through varied experiences over a matter of years. We are not told how Adam and Eve came to know language and develop communicative skills. Were their brains like computer hard drives into which God installed software programs of knowledge of their bodies, their emotions, their world about them – a full education of theology, gardening, physiology, biology, psychology, zoology, geography, astronomy, etc.? What level of education and experience would they be given? If they were given full knowledge, why was it not passed on to their descendents? If they were lacking in these things, were they imperfectly made?

It is generally accepted that there was no death until after the fall. Both the first couple and the animals ate food. Would they have died if they ate nothing? If they ate any living thing, it would have caused its death. If Adam pulled up a plant in caring for the garden, would the plant have died? How did predatory marine creatures survive without eating other marine life? If all were vegetarian until after the flood, why did Abel, the second born son, raise sheep? God would have had to reconstruct those herbivorous animals which later became carnivorous. As the animals bred, did all the tremendous amount of discharged but unused sperm continue living?

The boy who agreed to work a month for an employer for one penny the first day to be doubled each day would be owed more than half a billion pennies at the end of the first month. That illustrates the exponential multiplication possibilities of each insect, creature, and plant if there were no death. In a short time the fast-multiplying insects would smother the earth.

Can, or could, a person eat knowledge? They were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as though God did not want them to have that knowledge. Yet, after they were warned not to eat, they then had knowledge of good and evil before they ate. Their violation was not out of ignorance.

If Eden was a place of perfection as we have assumed, it would need no dressing, or cultivation, yet Adam was given the task of doing that. Because there was no death, he would not have had so much as a dead stick or sharp bone to use as a tool. Did God provide tools and skills for him? If so, why would later generations not have learned the use of such tools?

"The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), yet she had actually given birth to no children at the time. Speaking of naming, Adam gave names to all the creatures (how many species?) on the day of his creation before Eve was created and brought to him. An impressive zoo there! We might wonder if he wrote down their names and what became of the list. And we can wonder where they slept and found protection from the weather and what they used for dishes, vessels, and grooming. Add to the list of wonders the points that they were ashamed of their nakedness even though they were alone as husband and wife, and that they

were able to hide from God when they heard him (a Spirit) walking in the garden.

You may think I am attacking the credibility of the Bible, but that is not my purpose. I am proposing, however, that some, or many, things in the account of Adam and Eve in Eden may not be literal. You may have a quick explanation for each point that I have raised, but how do you know it is an accurate explanation? I am not denying that God can do what he wishes. I am saying the account of creation and Eden **is not all that simple**.

Many believers (millions, I assume) interpret the account of creation and that of Adam and Eve in Eden as being **theistic** rather than **scientific** and **historical**. They do not question the power of God or his work in creation but, recognizing problems with the scientific approach, they are willing to accept an allegoric meaning. The narrative is believed to be preserved divinely to point all human kind of all ages to the one God as the source of all and to indicate that the human predicament is caused by rebellion against the Creator, while also at the same time revealing God's concern and ultimate provision for redeeming man.

No scientific theory should be made into a necessary tenet of faith. Nowhere in the theology of the Scriptures are the process of creation, and/or the stages of creation God might have utilized, and the length of time used, made into a dogma of saving belief.

In a different context in discussing debatable issues, Paul urged, "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (Rom. 14:22). Whatever your conviction is, live by it, but don't reject your sincere brother whose convictions differ from yours.

That is a Spirit-approved rule to follow in all debatable matters of theology for we must admit that **they are not all that simple**. []

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

I can't help but think of all the people that tell me they have no use for a computer. It's sites like this one that is more than enough reason to own a computer. I thank the Lord for sites like these and I know HE is using this medium to spread the name of Jesus Christ. Praise him, to him be all the glory. - David Tidwell, Elkmont, AL. <Amnesia@airnet.net>

I read your book many years ago and it gave me hope, for the COC. I have much difficulty trying to comprehend why some people are so determined to hang on to traditions that are causing people to leave and many churches to die. -Barbara Franklin, Canal Winchester, OH.

I just want to thank you for your ministry! *Free In Christ* is what I've been fervently searching for. -Crissa Letson, Pensacola, FL

Once again, I do not see any of the letters which I have written to you published, but rather letters of accolades. Do you truly wish for the truth to be expressed or are you censoring all of your replies as you have mine in order to promote your agenda.

(This later) I am concerned at and saddened by your view of and experiences with churches. Most of what I read of yours speaks of the arrogance and self righteousness of churches you have associated with. I am truly saddened to hear this. In my experiences, the overwhelming majority of christians

I have associated with have always been loving and kind, open to study and discussion of God's word and eager to discern the truth.

I have read your book "Free In Christ" and have been on your email list for over a year. I can agree with much that you espouse, but also find points of disagreement. But the point that saddens me so much is the attitude expressed by you and encouraged in others that churches and those within them are legalistic scribes and pharisees. It makes me very sad to hear these sentiments over and over again, with the end result being broken churches further denominationalizing of the Lord's church. Please take into consideration the good done, and truth taught by these other brethren, and give them the benefit of the doubt that they are sincerely seeking the truth just as you are. Season your denouncements with courtesy and meekness, gently persuading those that you deem to be in error, in hopes that God will grant them a change of heart to know and accept the truth. -Keith Moore, Fort Huachuca, AZ <Coronath@aol.com>.

Cecil, I have enjoyed your books, articles, and newsletters for some time now, but have never written. I haven't written because I didn't think I could express in words my true feelings. I have decided to try. I want to thank you for your dedication to Christ and His gospel, thank you for your courage to stand firm with your message, thank you for your humility, and thank you for the inspiration and encouragement you provide to so many in bondage. Also, thank you for your wonderful web site that has pointed me to so many great writers (Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, R. L. Kilpatrick, and Edward Fudge). I have been a member of the COC for 35+ years and was in bondage for 30+ of those years. I wasn't happy with our traditions and insecure in my salvation. I thought I was the only one with those feelings until I discovered your books and web site. I am free at last and I thank you for pointing me in the right direction. I have taken God out of the box and now have real joy in my life. Thank God and thank you!! -Ken Loggains, Fort Worth, TX <ken.loggains@lmco.com>.

I think it goes without saying that none of us are totally alike in all our spiritual beliefs. You, however, say many things I agree with and you always cause me to think. I truly appreciate your searching attitude, openness to the word and fresh perspective. I wish all Christians had your attitude. May God bless you with many more years of study and writing. -Rob Ford, Edmond, OK <fordrm@oge.com>.

Whenever I see our "people" bashing one another, I take time to scan your site and it's a time of refreshment! -Barry Bunn, Dallas, TX <bbunn@jcpenny.com>.

Great to see this page and other interesting pages. I talked to you quite a few years ago as a questioning college student from Beaumont, TX. I was glad back then that other people had some of the same thoughts as I did concerning the church and Christianity. If any one lives in Washington state, I would love to correspond. -Shelby Cade, Okanogan, WA <scade@rocketmail.com>

Well, you did it again! You hit the nail of truth right on the head concerning polygamy. It might make us uncomfortable as Americans, i.e. "God's New Chosen People" but polygamy is just the sort of thing that we must leave alone if it is encountered in the "wild". One of the biggest problems in Christianity is that we don't just convert people to Jesus, but we then foist our Western European culture off on them as well. Of course the CoC goes even further that that - we don't allow them to worship God with instruments or drink actual wine or - the list goes on. I think that is one of the biggest reasons that Christianity is not progressing into the cultures of billions who desperately need it. If we could just get the message that

people must put their faith in God through Christ and love their neighbor as themselves and lead godly lives in easy to understand moral ways that most societies (all?) accept then pretty much leave them alone - a great change might occur. - Kelly Hightower <hightower@fwst.net>.

(Polygamy) Excellent insight, Cecil. Having labored in the mission field, I often find other missionaries who cannot fit into the culture where they are working, mainly because they cannot divorce themselves from their own cultural inbreeding back home. -Leon Roberts, <LRobe22475@aol.com>.

(Polygamy) If we're called in the state in which the Lord assigned us, does that include two homosexuals or lesbians who are in a committed relationship and in a relationship with God? I mean no trouble. I have a friend who seems to think it does, yet it is difficult to reconcile with my previous teaching. -<mbarry@troi.csw.net>.

Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ – or Who?

This is no big deal, but it amazes me that people still indicate that the Corinthian disciples had formed quarreling parties claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ (1 Cor. 1:10f). There were divisive quarrels among them for which Paul was giving reproof, but the contentions were not centered around any or all of those mentioned.

Paul adapted a literary style intending to deal with this most serious problem as tactfully as possible. Dealing with the issue rather than the persons involved, he substituted his own name and those of other non-involved parties for those who were guilty. This would enable them to make correction with the least humiliation. Attacks on issues arouse less defense than those on persons. Putting one's self in a suspect position also takes the glaring light off the person who needs the message.

In discussing the matter on into Chapter 4, Paul inserts himself and Apollos particularly into the scene. Then, in Chapter 4:6, he explains, "I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us to live according to the scripture, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another." The ASV expresses it more clearly as "Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes... ." It was a literary device.

The Corinthian problem was not in exalting Paul but it involved disparaging him! In the remainder of the chapter, he reproaches their arrogance in displacing him. They were not building a party around him but were putting him down. He claimed his rightful place among them, declaring with sarcasm, "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (v. 15). Those "countless guides" were discrediting Paul's apostleship in order to establish themselves as authentic teachers while they misdirected the disciples.

The specific issues over which they were dividing the people are not enumerated, but we can well suppose that the corrective teachings in the epistle addressed some of them. Since Paul was always opposed by the ever-present Judaizers, we may speculate that they were the chief culprits in Corinth.

After addressing some of their problems in the next four chapters, in the ninth chapter he begins again a defense of his own standing among them. Evidently, the heretical leaders were unmoved by Paul's letter, so he wrote another. In it, though he still did not make it a personal issue by naming the guilty parties, he was much stronger in his portrayal and denunciation of them. We will not be so tedious as to mention all of Paul's defense in

the epistle (The point does not deserve it), but much of the letter is a self-vindication.

For our purpose here, it will be sufficient to read 2 Corinthians 11. In biting sarcasm, he chides, "For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things" (v. 4-6).

Then Paul unleashed his severest denunciation: "And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond with their deeds" (v. 12-15).

There is much more, but the point is clear. Paul was not the icon of one of the destructive parties in Corinth but he was demanding their unity and seeking to reclaim his place as their father in the gospel "that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 1:14).

In a literary device intended to make his medicine easier to swallow, he had substituted himself, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ as icons in the place of the false apostles. []

How's That Again?

When we take time to look critically at our own use of terms and some of our concepts, it can even become amusing. Commonly used words and expressions are easily absorbed into our usage so that we may not think of their real meaning or consistency. We shall list just a few non-life-threatening ones here in order to illustrate our point and maybe make you more conscious of your vocabulary.

<> One of our often repeated mottoes has been, "We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent." But our very motto includes the word *Bible* which is never used in the writings we have in mind! Maybe you are thinking to yourself that the word *Bible* means *book*, and that where the Book speaks we speak and where the Book is silent we are silent. But nowhere is our compiled New Testament canon mentioned, much less called a book! The accepted writings were not approved and collected into anything like a book until generations after the last writer died. So calling the writings the *Bible* is speaking where inspired men have not spoken!

<> "The Bible only produces Christians only." In 2,340 consecutive days of broadcasting in New Iberia, Louisiana many years ago, I probably repeated that favored slogan of ours a thousand times. If that contention be true, however, there were no Christians during the first century, for generations passed before there was a compilation of the Bible. Not a word of the New Covenant scriptures had been written when the church began on Pentecost. Peter preached (proclaimed, evangelized) the Gospel which led hearers to believe and become disciples. In their obedience to the Gospel, the Lord made them to constitute the saved group which we call the church. Thus, people became Christians and their congregations began operation without the Bible. Must it be different today?

<> We all know that Jesus was a carpenter, don't we? He worked in his father's carpenter shop, we learned from childhood. But where does the Bible say a word about that? According to Vine, Joseph was a *tekton* – meaning "any craftsman, but especially a worker in wood, a carpenter" (Matt. 13:55; Mk 6:3). If Jesus was a *tekton*, that could mean that he made jewelry, pottery, furniture, or houses. Sons often followed the trade of the father, but not always.

<> The word *cross*, meaning a beam of wood with a crossbeam, is not found in the New Testament writings. The word is always translated from the Greek *stauros* which means an upright pale or stake.

<> No doubt, many times you have heard that Mary Magdalene was a former prostitute. She was one among "some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out..." (Luke 8:2). Her previous condition was a far cry from prostitution. Why would people want to imply such a thing since there is not a shred of evidence in the scriptures to support it?

<> Through the years and until this day, people talk about Jesus sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. The text says, "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). This does not identify his sweat as blood, but it was *like blood* in some way. How was it like blood? Not in its nature, but in the manner of its falling. It was falling from his body to the ground profusely in similar manner that a mutilated person would bleed. We need not attach some mystical meaning to the words.

<> In interpreting prophecy, sometimes a *day* means *a thousand years* and visa-versa. Have you not heard that? In commenting on God keeping his word, Peter said, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). He did not say it IS but IS AS. That is a comparison, not a literal meaning. God will keep his word whether a day or a thousand years pass before he does it.

<> For some time I have recognized that those *mansions* mentioned in John 14:2 are not heavenly palaces awaiting each of the redeemed. In spite of the fact that newer translations do not use that word, the palatial concept is still fixed in the thinking of disciples. (More later, perhaps) []

Jack Rabbits and Turtles

At full throttle from the first leap, as the fable has it, the rabbit looks like a sure winner over the patient, plodding turtle, but he may become a disappointment in the long run.

As I think back over the last sixty years, I recall many good men who were once the "hottest horses running." They had energy, charisma, and zeal to promote some phase of good work. Such men were sought after by churches to come for campaigns and seminars. They could influence and move people. They were specialists in evangelism, organizing congregations, promoting missionary activity, teacher training, and such. A few each decade were in the limelight with their names gracing the journals.

Then, after a few years, you might ask, "Hey, where's *What's-his-name* these days and what is he doing? That one had slipped out of sight, and attention was focused on other rabbits that had flashed into the lead. There was a burnout of zeal and the patient and persistent turtle that had stirred up no dust was in the lead.

These men did great good. I do not want to be disrespectful of them. My aim here is to point out the need for

the day-by-day religion that lasts a lifetime. No one can run full speed all the time any more than his car can. To try to maintain maximum speed may be destructive for both the car and driver.

Congregations can become dependent upon enthusiasts. They engage a man to come among them who promises to convert the community, to get them all going in high gear, and to raise the spirituality and zeal of everyone to a pinnacle. After a few months or years, the daily grind of business as usual may begin to wear. Those whose zeal was intensified by him may become frustrated and those who looked to him as their remedy may begin yearning for a new jack rabbit. The preacher may begin to dream of another congregation that will renew his zeal and join in another dash of the high-speed race.

Burnout is the hazard. Our universities and seminaries (We may call them preacher training schools.) send a steady stream of young men into the pulpits, but little gain is made over the number leaving in discouragement.

The life of a disciple, whether a preacher or not, is a life-long marathon. Like the turtle, the runner must set a pace that is practical, keep the goal in view, and continually sustain a determination to run with patience the race that is set before him, looking to Jesus who is the initiator and goal of our faith.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

CREEDS AND STATEMENTS OF FAITH

Edward Fudge

An inquirer asks, “What is the difference between creeds and statements of faith, and why do the Churches of Christ generally oppose both?”

The English word “creed” comes from the Latin verb “credo,” meaning “I believe,” so the word itself points to a “statement of faith.” From a practical standpoint, churches (or denominations) usually have creeds, while all sorts of parachurch organizations have “statements of faith,” although there are exceptions in both regards. Most denominations accept into membership people who do not subscribe to their creed, but do require its acceptance by those serving as official leaders (pastor, elder, deacon) and by those who would be church teachers.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell, founding fathers of the Churches of Christ, did not oppose “the use” of creeds (to identify and locate a church on the theological landscape, or as a teaching tool), but they strongly oppose “the abuse” of creeds (as a measure of Christian soundness or to identify a “true Christian”). When creeds were “abused,” in the Campbells’ view they became divisive and did more harm than good. Churches of Christ have traditionally gone further than the Campbells did, and have rejected the “use” of creeds as well. Interestingly, we have sometimes fooled ourselves on this point, having simply

substituted an unwritten creed for a written one, then used it in a way our pioneers would have considered abusive.

The so-called Apostles’ Creed, which dates in some form to the second century, is widely used across the entire Christian spectrum and can be used comfortably by any Christian congregation, if one remembers that the word “catholic” simply means “universal” and refers to all of Christ’s people through the centuries and around the world. Some Churches of Christ today are joining believers of other denominations in using the Apostles’ Creed, consciously expressing a sense of place in the universal Christian Church.

(Copied by permission from Edward Fudge’s daily email “gracEmail.” Subscribe free at <Edwfudge@aol.com>. Also, 150 similar relevant questions are answered in his 296-page book, *Questions & Answers*, which you may order from me for \$13.50 postpaid.)

