

FREEDOM'S RING

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

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Do You Need An Attorney?

Do I need an attorney? Perish the thought! That would mean that I have a problem that I cannot handle myself. It would mean that I am culpable, or in danger of great loss, even to being assigned to Death Row. There must be a gathering of facts in my favor and/or defense for a convincing presentation of my case. The system is so complicated that I cannot stand before the judge alone but must depend upon one more qualified than I. I haven't enough money in my account to pay for an attorney's services. Can I even trust the lawyer to devote himself fully in my interest?

Yes, I am in desperate need of an attorney because of my condemning behavior. To my great advantage, due to my poverty, I have a court-appointed defender to stand before the judge in my place at no cost to me.

When he created you and me, God glorified us with some of his own likeness and freedom of choice. We violated that trust, alienating ourselves from our Maker so that now we must answer to him as our Judge. God loves us and wants us all to be reconciled, but his integrity would be violated if he just overlooked our sins. The sting of sin is death. We face that penalty as we stand before the Judge. Added to that, we have no standing before the Court. We are aliens. If we should own the whole world, we would have nothing to give in exchange for our lives. We are penniless in merit.

Moved by his love for his creature, God determined to become a man, taking on himself all the venomous, deathly sting of sin in the place of his creatures. As Son of God and son of man he gave himself as a mediation. He stood before the Father as our proxy allowing his vicarious death to plead our case. Symbolically, we place ourselves with him in that experience in our baptism (Rom. 6:3-4).

In the presence of the Judge, our Counselor brings his client. He explains to the Court that his client, though a life-long sinner, is accounted as innocent due to the fact that he, the Advocate, accepted the penalty himself. Does not that violate the integrity of God to remit the penalty of sin? It was not disregarded; it was paid in full measure! How, then, can the guilty be dismissed as justified before the Court? Because he, though guilty, is credited as being righteous by the merit of the Mediator, the Advocate, the Intercessor who gave himself for us.

What is the condition or obligation of the one being reconciled? He can do nothing to enhance the atonement made for him. He accepts the free gift of justification by obedient faith and dedication to him who brought him to God.

John assures us, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous..." (1 John

2:1). An **advocate** (*parakletos*) is one "called to one's side." Vine elaborates: "It was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defense, an advocate; then, generally, one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, advocate, as in 1 John 2:1, of the Lord Jesus." The word is rendered **Comforter** in references like John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7 in which Jesus, our advocate was promising to return to be with them in the person of another advocate / comforter / counselor / intercessor -- the Holy Spirit.

The plea of the atonement still intercedes in our behalf else we would be aliens separated from God again. This is not a **pleading** or **begging** of the Father on the part of the Son or the Holy Spirit as though the Father is less loving and forgiving than the Son. Must God plead with God? (See *Free To Speak*, Ch. 1). Jesus himself is our plea, our justification, the one who stands in our place before the Court of heaven. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). "Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

Jesus has gone "...into heaven itself, now to **appear** in the presence of God **on our behalf**. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly... . But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age **to put away sin** by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is **appointed for men to die once**, and after that comes **judgment, so Christ**, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear** a second time, **not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**" (Heb. 9:24-28).

Because of our guilt, it was appointed that we die and then be judged. But Jesus filled that appointment of death for us and he stands before the Judge in our stead. When he comes to receive us, it will not be to deal with our sin. He has already done that! It will not be to face God in judgment. He has already stood there as our Mediator, Intercessor, Attorney, Counselor, and Comforter and has cleared our case before the eternal Court of justice and mercy – justified and forgiven!

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him " (John 3:16f).

Do you need an Attorney? []

False Teachers and False Teachings

I write out instructions for you to turn right off 173rd Avenue on to 170th Drive in order to get to my house. You get to 170th Drive and learn that it does not go right, but only left. Do you mutter contemptuously, "That guy deceived me by giving me false instructions; he is a false guide; he does not want me to visit him"? More likely, perhaps with some disparagement of my age, you will say, "Cecil's senility is showing! In his confusion he gave me incorrect directions."

In my earlier days, I taught that it was wrong for a woman to cut her hair. I based that on Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 11. Later, I recognized my error in forcing such an interpretation. Paul was not making a universal rule about hair styles. In retrospect, was I giving a false teaching? Was I a false teacher? Absolutely not!

The primary meaning of the word *false* is "not genuine, intentionally untrue, adjusted or made so as to deceive." There is a difference between an incorrect teaching and a false teaching, and between a mistaken teacher and a false teacher!

However, too often we have ignored that whale – mainly because we have been evil in our attitude. Sometimes we have been so eager to castigate others who differ that we have judged their motives contemptuously, accusing them of being deceitful teachers whose intentions are to mislead. But when we ourselves are mistaken on a teaching, that is a horse of a different color. A incorrect teaching done by a Baptist or Presbyterian is so much more damning than one taught by a teacher in the Church of Christ! ☹

Every one of you who has spent thirty minutes teaching the Bible has taught something incorrectly! That is a bold assertion that I cannot prove, but I think that few of you will disagree. Were you a deceitful teacher? Or a mistaken teacher?

If I brand others who teach misconceptions as being false teachers, then I am implying that I do not teach any misconceptions. How nice a little conceit can make me feel!

Many times I have heard preachers quote a series of prooftexts to support an erroneous point. I might have to admit to that myself. If the preacher did such a thing, knowing that his argument was invalid, he was intentionally manipulating the Scriptures to deceive. He would be a false teacher.

In earlier years in my simplicity and ignorance (not outgrown yet!), I repeated arguments that I had inherited in our tradition. I taught that such things as midweek participation in the communion or taking a midweek collection or the singing of solos in our assembly were failures to "abide in the doctrine of Christ" that John warned against (2 John v. 7-11) and also made one accursed for preaching "another gospel" about which Paul warned us (Gal. 1:6-9). Later, I realized that the doctrine John warned about was the denial that Jesus had come in the flesh (v. 7), and Paul was condemning those who were claiming justification by keeping the Law of Moses (5:4). My pet issues had not been invented when John and Paul wrote; so they were addressed neither by command or principle.

After having learned of my ignorance in perverting those passages, if I had continued to use them in that manner, I would have been dishonest. I would have been using those texts deliberately to deceive others in "proving" my points. I would have become a false (deceiving) teacher turning passages of Scripture into false teaching (adjusted or made so as to deceive). The principle involved here is wide in its application.

By the frequency of our use of "false teachers," one might get the idea that it is a favorite term of inspired writers. However, it is used only one time (2 Peter 2:1). And all those "false teachings" – well, my concordance lists not one reference to that term which we have thrown about so loosely. Talk about speaking where the Bible speaks!

The Scriptures offer numerous cautions about those who would intentionally teach error in order to build their cases, but those persons were people of evil intention, not some fellows from the cotton patch like me, or from the university like you, who were earnestly trying to teach God's word.

The Scriptures speak of false prophets, false brethren, false Christs, and false apostles. They were not false necessarily because of what they were teaching but because of the role or capacity they were claiming or usurping. These were false men! Their intentions were to deceive. Evidently, fellows like that have not all vanished from the earth. Let's be sure we do not perpetuate their tribe by our misleading use of those terms which reflect our misconceptions and poor attitudes..

(More on this subject is in my first book, *Free In Christ*, Chapter 10.) []

Hook's Points

Your loving encouragement and prayers cheer us on. Our outreach continues to expand as my energies and mental concentration diminish. You who might claim to be as strong at 80 as you were at 60 have my sympathy for growing senile at such an early age! My taking over Lea's household work makes me appreciate her work through the years even more. I am thankful that I am able to do it now.

I eagerly read all the personal notes you send us, but I cannot read all the essays, books, periodicals, and impersonal and forwarded email that you send. Neither do I find time to check out all the web pages that I am invited to inspect, nor to respond at length to the questions you send. I am honored that you think to share these things. It is not due to lack of interest that I fail to respond. Thank you for caring and understanding.

\$4,362.09 is in the operating fund (June 30) due to your unsolicited donations. You never let us worry about expenses. Your gifts to the ministry enable us and confirm our mission. There is another aspect that is invaluable to me. It enables me write and publish my thoughts, outlandish and foolhardy as they may be, without having to gain permission of a congregation, committee, or board of any kind. If permission from any such body had been necessary, I feel sure I would never have gotten a book or newsletter published! Your gift is a gift of liberty to me, and we trust that it is liberating to others. We trust that God is using us as we work together.

My computer no longer grinds and groans as it functions at a sick snail's pace. Mike Lafferty of our congregation and Paul Prince (Lea's favorite son-in-law ☺) upgraded it to Windows98. Now it blinks out functions. Some new parts were paid out of the operating fund. Thanks to all.

Freedom's Ring is free for the asking. If you receive it and don't read it, please let us know so we can remove your name. We don't offer a slick-paper publication with white space, fancy fonts, insets, icons, and shadow-printing to lure your attention. Those don't help the one searching for information. They are not used on the stock market pages, but you go there for information anyway.

We are having to change servers. Vic Phares is handling all that technical stuff that extends our outreach. He is a tireless worker. There will be some added cost.

The Telegu version of *Free In Christ*, after some delay, is now ready for free distribution. A quality job. The project was headed by Dr. J.B.M. Prasad. We thank God for it and trust him to make some use of the 1000 books among the seventy million people who speak Telegu in India.

Our dear brother, Dr. Leroy Garrett, delivered the commencement address for Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee. At that time he was awarded their James A. Garfield Award "For Noteworthy Service To The Church." He is the first from the Churches of Christ to receive it from this graduate school of theology associated with the Christian Churches.

Leroy has also been invited to participate in the ACU Lectureship in 2000. It is good that, after a lifetime of being on the cutting edge of redirection and bearing all the rejection incumbent upon a reformer, he is receiving this bit of public acceptance from "our people." His writings have influenced many preachers, pew people; and professors who have been too cautious to give him credit.

Youth Minister Opening! Since Aaron left, about 55 teens here look forward to a new leader. Aaron was deeply spiritual, creative, innovative, energetic, a communicator, self-motivated, and married. If that describes you and you are interested, call Judy Jones at 503-646-2241

Not All That Simple (Continued)

4. Refining Our Faith

The heavy machinery roars and the crush of rock is thunderous. This process is followed by application of intense heat. Surely, drastic measures are being taken to destroy something.

Actually, that is not the case, however. This is part of the process of producing delicate necklaces, brooches of intricate filigree, and artfully engraved jewelry of gold. Some gold has been found in nugget form needing little refinement, but generally it is not all that simple.

Although they know they do not have all the answers, some disciples seem comfortable and content with their limited understanding. They have "picked up" a few nuggets of faith. Their present set of beliefs offers refuge from the discomfort of facing new ideas and change. They are in fear of any questions or newly found knowledge that creates uneasiness.

Simple, trusting faith – how appealing! There is a difference, however, in simple and simplistic. We may ask, for example, is it simple or simplistic to believe that the sun circles a 6000 year old, flat, four-cornered earth with God on a throne in a specific place just above one's particular location on earth from which heaven is up and hell is down (all of which can be "proved" by Biblical prooftexts)? If I hold on to such beliefs, that is my prerogative, even though I tend to freeze progress of learning of both religion and science by my limiting attitude. Since our relationship with God is not determined by a correct understanding of these things, I err when I condition fellowship upon conformity to my beliefs in such matters.

A more convincing and rewarding course is that of continual search for, and understanding of, previously unrecognized truth. That path holds no fear of what will be learned and its traveler is ready to initiate changes made

necessary by better understanding. Faith is refined by questions – even questions expressing doubt. There is more faith in honest doubt than in holding on to the time-worn creeds, assumptions, and "cut and dried" explanations of men.

Valid faith which rises above suppositions and wishful thinking must be based upon truth. The author of the following quotation is unknown to me. I wish that I could claim credit for it but I am just pleased to copy it: "*To love truth sincerely means to pursue it with an earnest, conscientious, unflagging zeal. It means to be prepared to follow the light of evidence even to the most unwelcome conclusions, to labor earnestly to emancipate the mind from early prejudices, to resist the current of desires and the refracting influence of the passions, to proportion on all occasions conviction to evidence, and to be ready, if need be, to exchange the calm of assurance for all the suffering of a perplexed and disturbed mind. To do this is very difficult and very painful, but it is clearly involved in the notion of earnest love of truth.*"

Such an attitude may call for the crushing, pulverizing, and application of the intense heat of refinement to the ore of our learning over and over, not in an effort to destroy faith, but in order to refine it. When the disciples pled of Jesus, "Increase our faith" (Lk 17:5), they were expressing this attitude not knowing what it might cost them. Tests of faith, even those of persecution and various distresses, help to cast out the dross. Peter told disciples, "...you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:6f).

Your response to my "*Not All That Simple*" series has been confirming though I would expect that some of you are disagreeing privately. If you are upset by them, you may "unsubscribe" as one concerned woman did. I don't want to ruin your day.

There is rightful concern for the "weak" brother. I have reason to suspect that some who are afraid that that my writings will offend the weak brother may be the weak ones themselves. I don't want to weaken your faith. So far, even after my "*Six Days of Creation*" in *Free To Speak* and "*The Great Belly-Button Controversy*" in *Freedom's Ring*, Vol. 1, No. 9, almost all response from you has been affirmative. I have heard of no weak brother losing his faith. On the contrary, I have received response more like the one below from Larry Amyett, Jr. <so2001@swbell.net>.

"*Thank you for your article "Adam and Eve in Eden." I've long taken the Genesis Story as allegorical even though I was raised to take it literally. I especially appreciate your statements 'No scientific theory should be made into a necessary tenet of faith.' And later 'Whatever your conviction is, live by it, but don't reject your sincere brother whose convictions differ from yours.'*

When I was a child I was told that accepting Scientific Creationism was a requirement and that it was impossible to be a Christian and accept evolution at the same time. So once I saw sufficient evidence for evolution to convince me it was factual (I've always had an intense interest in science and technology) I abandoned my faith. Can you believe I was just 14 years old at the time! Looking back I wish I had my faith. A teenage boy certainly needs the Lord with all of the challenges and temptations presented against him.

I finally returned to the Lord, thanks to my wife, while we were in college. Her faith was the door by which the Holy

Spirit was able to reenter my life. Through her our blessed Shepherd was able to bring me back safely into the fold.

Your writings are a comfort and a blessing to me, Brother Hook. I'm so glad every time I receive a Freedom's Ring newsletter from you. It really brightens my day and gladdens me."

Well-meaning people, by binding their scientific beliefs on this boy, put an unnecessary obstacle in his course causing him to stumble. In our simplistic approach it has been difficult for us to see the truth of that, and only the Lord knows how many we have driven away because of it. Trying to shield our children and converts from hard questions which they will surely confront later concerning this and other subjects is an evidence of fear.

On a radio broadcast nearly fifty years ago, I spoke for thirty minutes demanding that a person could not believe evolution and the Bible, and hence, could not be a Christian while claiming to believe both. At the conclusion of my message the announcer motioned for me to come into the control room. Expressing some perplexity about my assertions, he confidently claimed, "I believe in evolution and the Bible and I am a Christian." What could I answer? Could I tell him it was impossible? I learned a sobering and humbling lesson that morning as the roles of teacher and learner were reversed! He was not playing with the same hand of theological cards that my teaching, training, and tradition had dealt me. I was confused as to which suit was trumps.

While living in that city, there was a young man in our congregation who confided in me that he believed in evolution. His "*weak faith*" brought him to every service of the church even though he lived fifty miles away! Through the years he has served diligently as a teacher and an elder. Do you still say that is impossible? What I am saying here is far wider in its application than just to the questions I raised about Adam and Eve in the Genesis account.

When we pose questions that shake our current explanations, we sometimes are warned that "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever..." (Deut. 29:29). Meaning: If I don't already understand and agree, it is one of the "secret things" to be avoided! But why be afraid to restudy the things that are revealed? Is not pursuit of knowledge commendable?

We are not too timid about making explanations that God did not reveal. In the Genesis account, for instance, it is commonly explained that Adam and Eve were given skins to cover their nakedness because blood had to be shed for their sin, and that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable because it was a blood offering. Sounds good! A neat explanation! But where did you learn that? Such an explanation has not been *revealed*! Those are suppositions! However, God has revealed why he accepted Abel's sacrifice while rejecting Cain's. Please read Chapter 4 of *Free As Sons* where I have dealt with the revealed answer.

Suppositions and explanations which differ from mine are proud displays of treacherous human wisdom. Mine are wise conclusions discreetly drawn from "necessary inferences!" (©).

No, it isn't all that simple! Let's keep the refining and polishing process going. Pondering questions whose answers might have escaped us should be no cause for rejecting evidences which we cannot deny.

What purpose has led me to state these things which do not put a writer on the most favored list? My aim is not to convince you of a certain process and time period God used in making us. The trump suit is the Gospel of which concepts of creation are not a part.

My aim is to emphasize that other sincere believers may differ from you in their studied conclusions and that either they or you who make those conclusions a test of fellowship are at fault. []

The Bible Code

"For three thousand years a code in the Bible has remained hidden. Now it has been unlocked by computer – and it may reveal our future. The events that happened thousands of years after the Bible was written – World War II, the Moon landing, Watergate, both Kennedy assassinations, the election of Bill Clinton, the Oklahoma City bombing – all were foretold in the code."

In those words we are introduced to *The Bible Code*, a 265 page book published in 1998 by Michael Drosnin, a former reporter at the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Using a computer, it proposes to lay out the Hebrew text of the Bible in block form similar to a cross-word puzzle and then to find messages revealed in "equidistant letter sequences." The coded messages are laid out horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, often crossing one another.

A long-time partner in this ministry, Bob Gleaves, of Brentwood, Tennessee, bought a copy for me and asked for my opinion of it. Then he suggested that I express my thoughts in *Freedom's Ring*. The "evidences" presented are based on computers, the Hebrew language, and mathematical sequences of Hebrew characters in which I claim no expertise at all. So I can neither prove nor disprove the startling claims Drosnin makes.

Favorable review of *The Bible Code* has been given by numerous well-known newspapers and journals. Noted mathematicians have added their verification. All this tends to be intimidating evidence of the credibility of the material.

If the claims made by Drosnin are true, they only affirm the truth of the Scriptures being God's message. That would be a definite plus even though we have no answer as to how to react to the predictions other than to wait to see if they all happen. On the other hand, if we believe he is presenting presently revealed truth and the time passes with nothing being fulfilled, it will only cause more distrust in the message of the Bible. The same can be said of all the current "end times" prophetic mania. So I will have to say that I cannot prove or disprove the message but will leave it for time to reveal.

These claimed discoveries of long-concealed truth point to God's dealing with Israel in "these end times." I am convinced that God fulfilled all his prophecies concerning Israel in his final rejection of them as a nation in A.D. 70 when he destroyed their nation and scattered their people.

Michael Drosnin and most of the quoted "authorities" are Jewish, so we may well suspect an Israeli bias. Drosnin disclaimed interest in religion, but he writes more like a religionist than a news reporter. We would expect a reporter to arrange his material better. He is repetitious and often vague, not really explaining how the Hebrew characters spelled out English words, especially since the Hebrew text does not have vowels.

Who arranged the Hebrew text like a crossword puzzle, conveniently manipulating some sections in longer lines than others in order to make the “equidistant letter sequences” work out properly? Where did he find a perfect Hebrew text from which to work? Most every page of your Bible has footnotes of alternate, or doubtful, readings. Any change in the length of words or sentences would throw the rest out of sequence.

The writer identifies the “end of days” as beginning with the death of Rabin in 1995. Peter puts Pentecost in the “last days” (Acts 2:17). God had spoken to man by his Son in the “last days” (Heb. 1:2). Other references indicate that the last days were current with the New Testament writers. If I understood correctly, Drosnin has Armageddon and the end coming through nuclear destruction. Later he indicated the end may come by a collision of the Swift-Tuttle asteroid.

So you can see that I am skeptical of there being such a thing as a divinely devised Bible Code. He seems to play the game with Hal Lindsay and millennialists who seem intent on having as much money in hand as possible when their predicted catastrophes occur. If Drosnin were truly trying to warn the world, he could probably distribute his book for under \$5.00 instead of \$25.00 hardback and \$15.00 soft cover.

As far as world history is concerned, most of the incidents claimed to have been fulfilled are but localized footnotes.

Yes, I admit to having approached this project with skepticism. Long before this book came to view, mankind has not lacked evidences concerning God and his will for us. Through the centuries believers have been able to accept the Bible as God’s revelation to us. That trust can still sustain us. []

WHAT I HEAR FROM YOU

Thank you for the lesson on using the Lord’s name appropriately! I feel like the Lone Ranger when I bring this up to fellow Christians! I’m forwarding your column to some of them. Again, thank you. -Cindy Hochstetler, Bismark, SD <mrsverlin@yahoo.com>.

Thank you so much for this issue of Freedom’s Ring. For many, many years I have been concerned about the language my fellow Christians have used. When I have said something to them about it, they seem surprised that I would think they meant anything by it. I don’t expect any better from non-Christians, but those who claim to be followers of our Lord need to clean up their mouths. -Leecia Penrod <lpenrod@mindspring.com>.

I’ve always thought it interesting that “God” and “Jesus Christ” are such frequent curse words. It is interesting in the sense that nobody ever smashes their finger with a hammer or gets cut off on the freeway and then shouts out, “Buddha!” or “Muhammed!” Why is this? Could it perhaps be because that yelling out such a curse would not violate Exodus 20:7? Has not Satan done his job well in convincing, not only the entire United States, but indeed the whole world that “the name” to profane is “Jesus Christ”? Yes. The very fact that the only name under heaven by which men may be saved is so frequently blasphemed is proof that it is the only name under heaven by which men must be saved! If those who so frequently took this name in vain only realized the spiritual battle that has been waged against their souls, they would be able to see that the universal acceptance of “Jesus Christ” as a swear word is no coincidence. -Brent . <Brentm@TSCControls.com>.

I just read your article on the conversion of Paul. Thank you. I have been preaching for 29 years and, in fact, have taught that lesson. It still thrills my heart to realize how simple God has made it for us to understand His message. That simple revelation on Saul’s conversion cuts clearly and cleanly through our Biblical interpretations of faith and grace. I have spent a lot of time lately wading through tremendous amounts of material that we preachers and pastors have written and put on the internet. You know, sometimes it becomes almost wearisome to read our stuff. I trust we are investing as much time and energy into loving our fellowman. I guess it is a good thing that Paul did not have a computer. I know he did slow down long enough to write, but the Lord had to throw him into prison to get that done. -Gordon McElvany <tantex@trip.net>.

THE COMING AGAIN OF JESUS IN JOHN 14

Evangelist John L. Bray

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

It has been traditional for this passage to be taken as a promise of Christ to come back visibly, bodily, and personally from Heaven to rapture Christians and take them back to Heaven with him. But this is not the meaning of this passage. What it really means, and what Jesus was really talking about, was that after He had gone, He would send the Holy Spirit back into the world to dwell with His disciples.

Some also believe that this refers to the time of death: “Hence in John 14:2f we read of being taken up into the ‘mansions’ of the Father’s house by the returning Son – doubtless a reference to the death of believers.” (New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 1, p. 440). This also is not the meaning of this passage.

Jesus said He would come to “receive” His disciples (have a “friendly encounter”). It did not say He would take them to Heaven.

Let us examine this passage and its context to see if this is true or not. There are several reasons we might consider as to why the traditional concept is not correct:

1. The Meaning of the Father’s House

First, there is the meaning of *my Father’s house*. Where and what is the Father’s house? Most Christians reading this passage just simply think of Heaven and let it go at that. Many think in terms of mansions inside a city of gold, etc. They do not give any further study into the matter. But it does not say here that the Father’s house is Heaven.

If we believe that God is *omnipresent*, then we believe that He is everywhere. There is no place in the universe where God is not. David asked, **“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Psalm 139:7-8).**

In Isaiah 66:1, God said, **“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me?”**

The Temple had been the place built by Solomon, and God wanted His people to know that those things had been; but His plans were to dwell directly with His people apart from any Temple. The Temple was symbolical, and sometimes the manifested presence of God was evidenced there. But the Temple was not to be looked on as "THE" dwelling place of God.

And now, since Jesus died, was buried, was raised from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples, we Christians take the place of the Temple as dwelling places of God. **"In whom ye also are buidled together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).**

The Holy Spirit abides in believers ever since He was given to the disciples. **"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19).** And the writer of the book of Hebrews said, **"But Christ as a son over his own house; WHOSE HOUSE ARE WE...." (Heb. 3:6)**

We are the Father's house today, with Jesus the Son residing in this house. There is one house, and many mansions. (See 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19-21; 1 Cor. 3:9-11, 16-17.)

2. Jesus is Talking About the Holy Spirit in John 14.

From verse 16 (of John 14) on, Jesus is specifically referring to the Holy Spirit by name. Jesus said, **"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16).** The word *abide* here is from the Greek word *meno*, which means "to stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy) – abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry (for)..." It is from this word that the word "mansions" (*mone*) is derived.

In verse 17 Jesus says, **"for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."** He was speaking of the soon indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who would come and take the place of Christ who had been dwelling with the disciples. But the language says that it is Jesus Who will come and dwell with them. **"I will not leave you comfortless; I WILL COME TO YOU" (vs.. 18).** This is the same thing He said to them in verse 3.

Since the Holy Spirit came, Jesus lives within us. **"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God well in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you..." (Rom. 8:9-10).**

And not only would it be Jesus who would come and dwell with the disciples, but it would be the Father as well. **"...my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (vs. 23).**

3. The Word "Mansions" Is the Same Word as the Word "Abode."

When Jesus said that His Father and He would come to the disciples and dwell with them, He used the word *abode*, which is the **same** word as the word *mansions* in verse 2 *mone*. Christians would become the mansions or dwelling places of the Father and Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The word for *mansions* / *mone* means "a staying, i.e. residence (the act or the place); -- abode, mansion." The word itself is derived from the Greek verb *meno*, as mentioned before, which means "to stay (in a given place, state, relation or

expectancy.) – abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry (for).

Webster's Dictionary says the definition of the English word *mansion* is a *stay, sojourn*. This is **obsolete**, meaning that this **used** to be the meaning of the word. We always have to think in terms of the past meanings rather than just what words mean today.

John 14:2 is the only place in the New Testament where this word is translated *mansions*. In **John 14:23** it is translated *abode*. It is the same word. Jesus said He would make His *abode* with us. We become the mansions of which He spoke in **verse 2**. He is saying that Christians will become the dwelling places of Christ in the Father's house.

This does not mean, of course, that there is no other coming of Christ than this. Most of the New Testament was written **after** the Holy Spirit had come, but it still continued to predict that Christ was yet to come. There is more than one "coming" of Christ in the New Testament. Most of our writings have centered around that "second appearance" of Christ which took place in A.D. 70. It was called "second" in relation to His "first" personal appearance.

4. Disciples Not To Be Troubled Because the Holy Spirit Would Come

In verse 27 Jesus said, **"Let not your heart be troubled."** This is the same instruction He had given to them in verse 2, showing that He is still talking about the same thing.

So what we have here is this: Jesus here in John 14 is saying that in the Father's house (Which was the whole universe) there were many places to abide, or dwell. But the disciples would become His house and He would dwell in them as mansions. He would come to them, in the person of the Holy spirit, in order to accomplish this. His going away to prepare a place for us involved His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. All of this was necessary in order for us to become mansions in the Father's house.

The modern concept of this passage is that the "mansions" mentioned are some great, beautiful, luxurious palaces in Heaven. This is not the meaning here at all. The word itself does not have that meaning. Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them. He did. He died, rose again, ascended, then sent the Holy spirit to indwell them.

He said he would come and **"receive"** them. This is the only time in the New Testament that this exact word is used (paralambano). It means **"to receive near, i.e. associate with one's self (in any familiar or intimate act or relation."** The meaning is that He would send the Holy Spirit in His stead to receive Christians into an intimate relationship, because the Holy Spirit would then dwell within them.

He did not say He would receive them in Heaven. This meaningful relationship He is talking about would take place on earth. He is not here talking of a second coming of Himself personally, but only in the sense of the Holy Spirit's presence.

He continued in verse 16 by saying that the Father would give them another Comforter (See also John 14:26; 15:26, and 16:7). The word **"Comforter"** means "an **intercessor, counselor**: -- advocate, comforter." In other words, He is the one who helps us to express our needs to the Father, as mentioned in **Romans 8:26**: **"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."** (Incidentally, this is not talking about Christians

speaking in “tongues” as some think. The Spirit’s intercession “cannot be uttered.”)

Jesus said this Comforter would “**abide with you forever**” (vs. 16). In verse 23 Jesus says, “We will **COME** to him.” Not just Jesus, but also the Father, “**and make our abode with him**” (vs. 23). As said before, the word *abode* is the same identical word in the Greek as for *mansions* in verse 2, and it refers to making the residence of the Father and the Son with the Christians.

It is important to see this – that when Jesus spoke of *mansions* (dwelling places) in verse 2, He was speaking of the same thing He was in verse 23 when He said His Father and He would come and make their residence with the disciples. The word is the same.

In verse 26 He said the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His name. This is the way Christ came to the disciples – in the person of the Holy Spirit. Then, in verse 27, still continuing the same discussion, He says again (as He did in verse 1), “**Let not your heart be troubled.**” Their hearts were not to be troubled, because they would be provided the Comforter to dwell with them. And this was the reason He said the same thing in verse 1, “**Let not your heart be troubled.**”

Then Jesus says that they had heard how He said, “**I go away, and come again unto you (vs. 28).**” He says this here in connection with His discussion of the Holy Spirit coming to them. What He says here in verse 28, in reference to the Holy Spirit, would have the same meaning in verse 3 where He said, “**I will come again, and receive you unto myself... .**”

So this beautiful passage in **John 14:1-3**, which so many of us preachers have used in the past at funeral services to comfort troubled hearts on the basis that Christ is going to come and take His children to “mansions in the sky,” does not mean that at all. It means, rather, that Christ promised to come in the person of the Holy Spirit and to indwell His Christians forever.

The Father’s house is everywhere. When God said, “**The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... (Isaiah 66:1),**” He was telling us that He dwells everywhere. “**Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee... (1 Kings 8:27).**” Whether there are universes beyond ours, we do not know. But if so, God is there, too. One writer said that if one grain of sand on the beach would represent our universe, then all the grains of sand in the whole world would represent all the other universes beyond ours. It staggers our minds to even think of this. And God is everywhere – omnipresent. But the amazing thing is, that God has chosen to make His abode in the hearts and lives of His people on this earth. “**But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?” (II Chronicles 8:18).** We are His abiding places, His abodes, His mansions. In the person of the Holy Spirit He comes to receive us to Himself, to associate Himself in a personal relationship with us.

And incidentally, do you know where the throne of God is now? It is in the midst of His people, right now in this life, in the holy city, the New Jerusalem, the church, in the new heavens and new earth: “**...the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it (the holy city, God’s people)... (Rev. 22:3).**”

(Used by permission. This article is to be included in another book by John Bray. He has challenged us again even as he did in *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, a well-researched, sensible, 293-page work, as the title indicates, revealing that all of Matthew 24 has been fulfilled. This book is gaining acceptance

in this time of radical predictions. Order it from him at P. O. Box 90129, Lakeland, FL 33804. Send \$15.00. Postpaid.) []

What Constitutes “Being Married”?

Because it is such an integral part of our society, we assume that everyone knows what marriage is. When a man and a woman agree before witnesses to accept each other as spouses and sign the license before witnesses, they are married. How could there be questions about that?

In an e-mail note a reader poses several questions. What constitutes “being married.” Is not a private commitment a marriage? Is a ceremony needed? Is sexual relationship marriage, as some claim? Does the Bible teach us how to become married?

Each of you has probably pondered these questions as you recognize the lack of definition in the Scriptures. I do not claim to know all the answers, but that has not deterred me from writing on other subjects that I am ignorant about! So here I go!

The Scriptures offer no precedent or instruction for any sort of formal ceremony in which a man and woman are “pronounced husband and wife.” Among the Hebrews and Semitic people, and in a greater part of the world (still common today), marriage was a family affair with strong societal implications. It included negotiations between the families involved through their family head (patriarch) which would include payment to the bride’s father. In our transient culture we have lost most of that sense of family, tribe, and societal relationship.

Acceptance of the terms of contract before witnesses amounted to a betrothal which was perhaps the nearest thing to a modern licensing, though the consummation of the marriage might be months or years in the future. This commitment was taken much more seriously than the present-day “engagement.”

At the time for the wedding male friends of the groom, carrying lamps or torches, escorted him in procession to the wedding feast. After the supper the finalizing of the wedding was the entrance of the groom into the “tent,” or chamber of the bride. Whether all these traditions were followed or not in each case, it seems that when a man would go into the tent or room of his intended wife in view of others, the marriage was recognized.

None of those customs are specified or bound by Christian writers. There is no indication that the wedding is a “religious service” though spiritual principles should influence it (as well as all aspects of our lives). Our concept of a “church wedding” came from the Catholic Church who defined “Holy Matrimony” as a sacrament administered by the Church only, that is, the priesthood. Thus, a “church wedding” was one “blessed” by the Church. A civil ceremony of marriage lacked that “official” blessing.

Although non-Catholics do not accept that theology, they have adapted the “church wedding” idea into a tradition of a formal wedding ceremony in a “church building” with a preacher officiating with no thought of meeting “church approval.” For many it has become a purely social tradition for ceremonial display of a pretentious “church wedding” even by those not spiritually inclined. The white wedding gown symbolizing virginal purity is now worn with impunity by pregnant brides and by those who were “live-in partners” up until the wedding. So for the most part, the “church wedding” is for the pageantry and a status symbol. The holiness and spirituality are determined by the hearts of the groom and bride rather than by the building or ceremony or whether it was officiated by a minister or a civil authority.

“A piece of paper cannot make a marriage,” is heard from some who wish to live together without a license of

marriage. That claim has validity. I became a driver of a car before Texas required that we have a license. Later, when I got my license, the piece of paper did not make me a driver or affect my driving, but I would have become a violator without it. I became a law-abiding driver with less culpability in future problems that might be anticipated. The same principle applies to having a marriage license.

If a couple agrees to live together without a wedding, are they married? How long would they have to live together to distinguish it from fornication? Would the relationship begin as fornication and develop into a holy relationship? If a couple pledge their love to each other and privately commit themselves to each other for life, would that not be a marriage? Though it would involve the most basic element of marriage, it still would not fill all the requirements.

The followers of Jesus are taught to obey the laws of the land and to live honorably in accordance with society. Our law specifies that spouses be a male and a female who have signed a witnessed contract to live as husband and wife. Why would any couple balk at signing such a contract?

It is because they want temporary companionship and sexual license without commitment to each other. They refuse the most basic expression of love and marriage – commitment. They want companionship of a person as long as it satisfies the selfish desires. Without commitment each partner, like a commissioned salesman, is on trial for pleasing performance every day of life. Think of living with someone who does not love and trust you enough to make a commitment to continue to love you after the heat of passion has cooled and real-life

authorized by the State to witness the contract of marriage. In some states additional witnesses are required. Thus it becomes a legal contract.

Previous to the legal contract, each party has already agreed to the contract, and in that sense, they are married except for the legality of it. A contract involves a meeting of minds. Questions of the binding nature of the witnessed contract arise when it may be revealed later that one partner deceived the other in the contract or that there was some legal violation such as lying about age. There is no true meeting of minds where there is deliberate deception. If a person pledges love where there is none, promises lifelong commitment without intention, or promises to be a true husband without revealing his sexual impotence, there is serious question as to whether a valid contract has been formed. When such deception has been revealed later, it may be reason for annulment of an invalid contract rather than “grounds for divorce.”

This is no claim to answer all the questions about “being married.” Maybe some thought has helped to clarify your ideas.

(Some points in this piece were adapted from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, pages 1996-1999. Some related references: Gen. 24:8; 26:34; 29:20; 34:3; Exo. 2:21; Dt. 22:23; Judges 14:1-20; 1Sam. 18:19f; Jer. 7:34; Matt. 1:19; 9:15; 22; John 2; 3:29; Rev. 18:23) []

problems begin to develop. The shadow of rejection and loneliness always looms ahead. Those taught in the Word will also be living with guilty conscience knowing that their sexual immorality condemns them.

No, a piece of paper cannot create love but signing one may express unqualified love. Where that kind of love exists, there is no hesitancy in signing a legal attestation of it. In true commitment each partner is signing a blank check knowing not what demands will be injected in the blank in the years ahead – whether it be sickness, sorrow, or poverty – the contract is “until death do us part.” Is that scary? That assuring love contract has been confirming, satisfying, and comforting for more than 53 years for Lea and me.

A social crusade in our generation has had a devastating effect on this basic social institution of our culture. Living together has replaced marriage by a great segment. Women boast unashamedly of having children out of wedlock thus undermining the family and home which is the foundation of civilized society. In their conceit and rebellion, they think they have greater wisdom than God who created and upholds the family and they seek to prove the wisdom of all previous civilizations outdated.

It is true that neither the laws of our land nor the Scriptures prescribe a ritual or ceremony of marriage. The judge, Justice of the Peace, priest, or preacher acts as one

