

## Grit In My Gizzard: No. 20

### Free At Last!

I was *free* at last! Although my pulpit work had been reduced for a while, I never felt the freedom from it before. After a long incarceration a freed prisoner feels an uncertainty about readjusting. I realized more than ever that my whole career had been one filled with tension. No longer did pressures build as the weekend approached calling for two sermons and maybe classes. We could now visit family and do the things others had always been doing on weekends which we could never do while serving a congregation. We could leave town without asking permission or notifying anyone of our schedule. Although my concern for God's people remained the same, direction and problem solving of the congregation were no longer my responsibility. A better comprehension of grace had brought me inward freedom; now I was free from our structured system.

My concentration span has always been short. After reading technical material in study for a time, I might find myself staring at words without any comprehension. So I have always had to take breaks during which I might do odd jobs of upkeep and repair. Since my youth I had taken a short nap after lunch or done some work requiring activity like visiting the hospitals. Now I could work at my own leisure without any feeling of guilt.

Because we always had to pinch every penny, I did the upkeep and repairs of my cars as much as I was capable, even to the overhauling of VW Bug engines with no hoist or anyone to help remove or install them. Lea would help me balance wheels on our cars by revving the engine while I added and adjusted weights to the back wheels hoisted by a bumper jack. I repaired and repainted the house in which we lived, even installing additional electrical circuits. I kept the yard, and in our twenty-one years in New Braunfels, I had a big garden which I enjoyed. Upon retirement I could feel free to spend as much time as I wanted on these projects or to leave them undone if I chose.

I continued to write, not to prepare sermons, but to deal with our traditional interpretations which we had made into dogma. Writing was new for me for through the years I had never written out my sermons but had just spoken from notes. I did not have time to write sermons, but my experience in writing was limited to church bulletins through which I learned the value of being concise. Even until this day I can never write an essay at one sitting but I do much revising and eliminating of excess verbiage. My efforts were for sharing thoughts with others. I never started out with any thought of publishing my material in book form.

As my essays began to accumulate with some being published in *Restoration Review* and *Firm Foundation*, I began to mail an accumulation to various friends and acquaintances. Almost without exception I would receive word back that those articles needed to be published in book for wider availability. I selected the minimum number of them which I thought properly stated my message and began to send the manuscript to some of "our" publishers. For some strange reason ☺ no one would touch it! Then I sent it to College Press. A few days later Don DeWelt called saying he would publish it and I would receive royalties from it as it sold. Great! That was exciting – but not for long. A few days later I received a most apologetic letter from the dear brother explaining that the board had over-ruled his decision. I do not relate this to diminish the memory of that

great man but to honor him for being willing to risk the publication of my controversial material, a risk that none associated with the Church of Christ had been willing to take.

Charley Elrod was a younger member of our congregation with whom I had little acquaintance. He came by our house bringing us a turkey, if I recall correctly, and I gave him a copy of the manuscript. A few days later he called to say he would pay for the printing of it. I expressed my gratitude but advised him that a private publisher has no channel of marketing for the advertisement and sale of a book. He replied that he did not intend for them to be sold but to be distributed free of charge! WOW! Let's get going!

I had the twenty-four chapters ending with "*The Free-Flowing Stream*" but somehow felt that it did not round out my message. It was like a revelation that the message of the climactic chapter, "*What God Requires*," developed in my mind.

Stopping at a crowded print show I had passed many times outside the city limits, I received a bid for the printing. Little did I realize how few shops there are that can do the entire job. It was operated by a dedicated older couple who had been missionaries in Latin America and provided thousands of free copies of the *Pentecostal Evangel* in Spanish. Charley had agreed on 1,000 copies but, in my foolhardy zeal, I ordered 3,000 for a much better price with me paying for the additional copies. As it turned out, Charley insisted on paying for them all. May the Lord reward Charley Elrod richly for enabling the first of twenty-seven printings amounting to 88,386 books. He has suffered some financial losses and other difficulties since which I think are relieved now. He has helped many thousands to enjoy freedom in Christ. I chose *Free In Christ* for the title and the Liberty Bell to symbolize it.

How would I advertise the books? While awaiting the printing of the books, I began to address 6' x 9' clasp envelopes to people on my address list, but that was a short list. I looked in *Firm Foundation* and other sources and gathered 250 addresses of individuals and churches. These were all stamped and addressed by hand ready for stuffing. I sent them all out and then braced myself for the onslaught which would surely come.

Very soon the phone began to ring. People could hardly believe they had found something in print that was so liberating. They were relieved, grateful, and enthusiastic and began to spread the word. In the first eleven weeks, I received requests for an average of 26 books per day. From December 1984 through April 7, 1985, 2,900 books had gone out. Ordering a printing of 5,000 after less than six months, we sent out 6,950 the first year averaging 19 books per day.

I have never asked for money. Readers began sending money, one family paying for all the postage. As the first printing was depleting I invited people to help pay for the second printing. After that I began paying for the printings and also selling the books. However, I did continue using money sent to my working fund to send free books with me recovering \$1.00 of my investment for each book sent free. I have continued that through the years even though that does not cover my cost by any means. Toward the end of the first year I paid for my first printing which was for 10,000 copies. In the first two years we sent out 12,750 books averaging 17 per day.

Requests began to come from other countries, particularly from various African countries, Australia, the Philippines, and India. These were sent free but mailing costs limited the amount we could send.

Dr. J.M.B. Prasad eagerly distributed them in India. He and others translated *Free In Christ* into Telugu there and, by our sending money for much more economical printing there, he has printed and given out 4,000 copies.

Sunday David Essien is the grandson of the Nigerian brother who began the work there through correspondence. Being a follow-up man for World Bible School, he has extensive interactions with believers there and surrounding countries. He kept requesting more and more books including all my titles. Because printing is so much cheaper there and no mailing cost is needed, through the good people who continue to send funds, I have been able to pay for eight printings of *Free In Christ* in Nigeria amounting to 19,530 copies. He has distributed a printing of 2,400 already this year and is begging for more. Disciples beg for books in Africa.

Out of Cape Town, Roger Dickson supplies advanced teaching material for about two thousand preachers in various countries at any give time. After email exchanges with him, he agreed to print and distribute *Free In Christ* to his students stating that he would need 3,000 copies at a cost of \$3.500. I had to tell him that I had no money in my fund and could not promise when I would have it. That was a Friday evening. The next morning at 8:00, a woman in Texas, a stranger to me, called to order a hundred copies of the book. In the conversation with her I told of Roger's proposal. Without hesitation, she stated, "My husband and I will pay for it!" After I emailed Roger, he wrote back saying he could print 4,000 copies for that amount! The effect of those books used by 4,000 preachers excites the imagination.

Through the leadership of Moises Lujan in El Paso, the book was translated into Spanish with a printing of 1,000. Due to a different mindset, however, there has been no great demand for the books. In the other countries mentioned, however, we can never satisfy the requests. I have received very little negative feed-back from those countries.

My other books have been added: *Free To Speak* – 1985, *Free As Sons* – 1988, *Free To Change* – 1991, *Free To Accept* – 1994, and my edited book, *Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship* – 1992. The total for these six books is 113,460. Playing with figures and counting an average of 25 chapters in each book as separate sermons to individuals – I have preached 2,836,500 sermons, or thereabouts! And multiply that by the number of persons who read each book. Including the books by Carl Ketcherside and Edward Fudge that I have reprinted, the total in print has reached 121,456, or thereabouts!

Through the generosity and trust of hundreds, even thousands, of partners most of whom I have not met, 55,413 copies of *Free In Christ* have been distributed free of charge with me receiving no profit from those distributed overseas and recovering a dollar each from those whose printing I paid for.

When I began selling the books, I set a price like \$4.95. Then I began to think how that is a manipulative device of salesmanship. My writings were plainly honest; so why should I use such a manipulation as though I were trying to sell you a product. So I changed to even dollar prices like \$5.00.

You may see my presentation of these figures as prideful boasting. Maybe it is, I admit, for I am proud of the many partners who have made this possible and I am boasting for them. May they be greeted and thanked in the next world by those they have helped to be there.

My freedom allowed this. If I had waited for sponsorship of a congregation to publish the book, no doubt, I would still be waiting. []

(Cecil Hook: July 2006)

P. S.: In July you have enabled me to send \$2,200 for another printing of over 1,600 books in Nigeria at a cost of \$1.36 per book, and that includes delivery. You are invited to be a partner in this exciting project.