



March 2010



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

A NEW WAY OF LIVING

By Ron Allen

John the Baptist, the last of the Old Covenant prophets, summed up Messianic expectation when he stated: *"I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come.... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit..."* (Luke 3:16). The baptism by the Spirit is again contrasted with what was offered by John in Acts 1:5 (See also Acts 19:1-6). When the Holy Spirit came emphatically at Pentecost, the disciples knew that John's prediction had been fulfilled; that they had passed from an old era to another that was marked by the immediacy and power of God's Spirit.

In Romans 7, Paul speaks of a *new way* of serving God. "We have been released from serving God by way of law," he says, "in order to serve in the new way of the Spirit." The Christian life is not the living out of obedience to a set of laws. It is in the deepest sense a spiritual experience (Romans 8:4, 5); a personal relationship with God.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is what made the New Covenant experience an essentially superior privilege to faith before Christ came. By the Holy Spirit, the promise of Jeremiah was realized:

"The time is coming declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.... I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

By his Spirit, the moral impetus of God finds its way into human life. Paul said that by the indwelling Spirit he shared in the power that raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). The apostles were in awe of the immensity of God's gift of the Spirit to the church. The phrases 'in the Spirit' or 'of the Spirit', which occurs many times within the pages of the New Testament, reflects the early Christian consciousness of eschatological blessing. Life was new, and better; a 'walking in the Spirit' (Galatians 5:16); 'living by the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22).

To be 'in the Spirit,' was for the early Christians, the same as being 'in Christ.' Hence: *"he who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 6:17). *"Through him we both have access to the Father through the Spirit"* (Ephesians 2:18). Two thousand years on, we believe we have access to the same privilege of the Spirit that gripped our first century brethren;

fortifying them to go and capture their world for Christ. Can it happen again? Yes, but after the pattern of the initial outpouring. The Spirit came by reason of, and through the work of, Christ crucified. Christ crucified is the procurer of the Spirit of God for his people. Is it possible that the church sometimes languishes because it values too little, the glory and might of Christ's achievement on the cross? We do well to recall Christ's challenge to the church in his day: *"You will not come to me that you might have life"* (John 5:40).



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EDITORIAL . . .

Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6).

A society that has lost its way begins to exhibit certain telltale signs of its malaise. As the morality of the ruling majority weakens, trifling regulations are elevated to stand in their place. Censorship of any kind is promoted to the level of a crime against humanity. On any single day the media will funnel lurid depictions of murder, rape, and a raft of other violent and perverse behaviors into millions of living rooms. While this obscene barrage occurs with scarcely a whimper of protest, wrinkles on a woman's skin or excess weight is seen as a tragedy worst than a dishonest deed. A politician's sexual adventures outside his marriage are a minor diversion; far less important than his raising of taxes.

Amid this bizarre collapse of public standards, individuals seek personal authenticity, by inventing and devoting themselves to their own dictums and codes. "My aim is to get in touch with my inner-self," or "From now on, I am going to be true to myself."

But how can a broken vessel mend itself? How can a self be true to a self if the self is not sure if it is happy with itself? How can the blind lead the blind?

The social milieu is comprised of millions of souls that are as unpredictable and changeable as the weather. Society will never be improved by endlessly subscribing to some new maxim, a new regulation, or a new motto. The creation of better people occurs when they learn to love in the highest sense of the word. There is no rule that can prescribe the way a child should love his mother and father; the way an employer ought to love his employee and vice versa; a doctor his patient, a law officer and an arrested party. What rule would be sufficient to sustain a marriage or a friendship?




Let us draw near to him. The world is waiting.

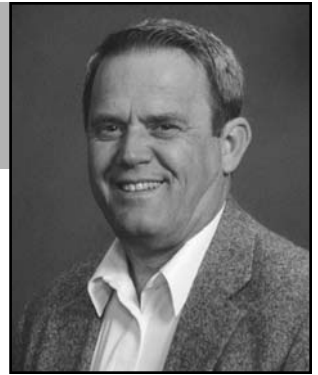
People are far too complex to be governed by formulas, recipes, and legislated routines. What they need is an encounter with One in whom love is present in the most refined, elegant, unsullied form. Contact with such a One is unfailingly poignant. There is an appeal to something within. "Deep calls to deep." It is an awakening which could never be affected by sanctions or injunctions.

The ultimate inducement to virtue—therefore, the ultimate hope for the world—can never be a law or a creed. A person; One who is manifestly flesh and blood; one of us, but at the same time one who is everything we are not, as well as everything our best selves would like to be—such a person would redeem humanity.

The good news is that there is such a One. His name is Jesus. The evidence of history is that men and women have grown in truth, decency, justice, and purity; they have expanded personally by finding love and all its values expressed to them in Jesus Christ.

Near the end of his ministry, Jesus told his disciples that he was going away, but he would not leave them alone; he would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17). Then he went on to say, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

Well might we who have believed in Jesus turn with renewed commitment and vigor to him who has pledged to never leave us alone in the world. He gave his life for us, but wrapped up in that very sacrifice is the gift of his Spirit. Christ the Son of God is with us. That is to say: the authority, the strength, subtlety, finesse, attraction, beauty, and winsomeness of God's own personality is here, accessible to us through faith in Jesus. Let us draw near to him. The world is waiting. 



Pastor Ron Allen

GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

Good News Unlimited magazine is published every month by **Good News Unlimited**, P.O. Box 6687, Auburn, CA, USA 95604-6687.

Good News Unlimited is an interdenominational Christian organization proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. Special emphasis is placed on the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ's righteousness alone. **GNU** also links the gospel to the needs of the whole person, to life-style, and preventive medicine.

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public meetings in Canada and overseas); and the dissemination of literature, audio and video material. (A comprehensive catalog is available free on request.)

Good News Unlimited is a nonprofit religious corporation supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA and Canada. An annual review of **GNU's** accounts is made by an external auditor. All regular donors to **GNU** may receive a financial statement on request.

Good News Unlimited is reached by phone at 530.823.9690. Fax 530.823.5338. E-mail gnu@goodnewsunlimited.org.

This magazine is free upon request.

March, 2010
Vol. 29, No.3

Published by Good News Unlimited

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GOD AND THE BONES

By Ron Allen

“He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live...?’ This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life” (Ezekiel 37:3-5).

In 599 B.C., the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. Its king and many of the nobility were taken captive. Ezekiel himself was among them. Jerusalem was left intact. Its remaining inhabitants, as well as the deported Jews, maintained an almost fanatical belief that their city was invincible; that the present situation was only temporary.

In due course, Zedekiah—the vassal king appointed by Babylon—rebelled. Ezekiel warned against this course of action. He tried to teach that the captivity was being used by God to create a new beginning for his people. But no one listened to Ezekiel. The Babylonians returned and reduced Jerusalem, along with Solomon’s temple, to rubble.

Captive Jews in Babylon lost all hope at that time. They felt that God had given them up for dead. They went about with their heads down saying, *“our bones are dried up, and our hope is gone” (Ezekiel 37:11)*. Then the Spirit of God came on Ezekiel. Israel’s sorry state was presented to him in visual dream. He was set down in a valley which had once been a battlefield. There was evidence of slaughter. The valley was full of bleaching bones. God led his prophet back and forth through the killing fields till the completeness and immensity of this death was fixed horribly in his mind.

That is when God asks a question: *“Son of man, can these bones live?”* When Ezekiel cannot answer, the Lord himself answers, and there follows the sound of large-scale rattling as the skeletons reassemble and flesh comes back to them. Then God breathes into the reconstituted bodies and they stand up on their feet—alive!

The immediate meaning of Ezekiel’s vision is spelled out in Ezekiel 37:11. The bones are Israel in its powerless and hopeless condition. Yet, there are implications for our times when the Christian church—at least in the developed world—seems to be in retreat; impotent before the forces of rampant paganism.

What is implied by the question, *“Son of man, can these bones live?”* Imagine touring the extermination facility at Auschwitz. You are led through huts with endless rows of tiered bunks, stacked with emaciated forms, waiting to die. Next you follow a batch of these doomed creatures into the

gassing room; you see them stacked dead and high. Then you see ovens, the smoke belching. Your guide turns to you and asks: *“Can these live?”* In the setting in which it is asked, the question is ludicrous. It was just so for Ezekiel. The question proclaims the obvious: these bones cannot live; this is a place of death, not life.

Now consider Ezekiel’s reply: *“O sovereign Lord, you alone know” (Ezekiel 37:3)*. Ezekiel cannot answer. All he knows is that he and every other man don’t know anything. Thus, embedded in his reply is a faith that with God all things are possible; God might just have an answer to the great death.

What happens next follows the Genesis pattern. Just as the Spirit of God brooded over the chaos to cause life to break forth; just as God breathed life into Adam, so now the Spirit enlivens Israel’s bones. They *“came to life” (verse 10)*. But

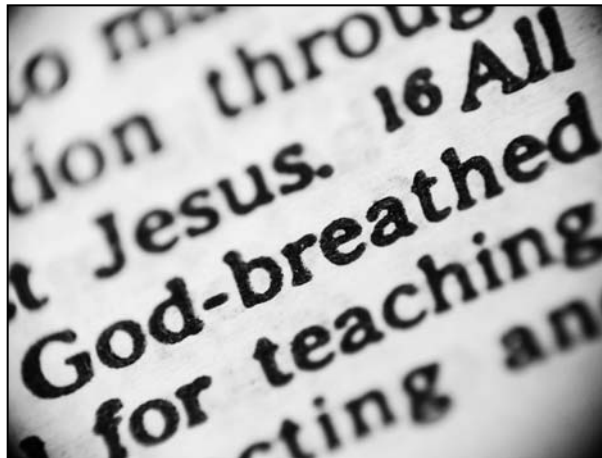
not until verse thirteen do we learn what kind of life they came to: *“Then you, my people will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them” (Ezekiel 37:13)*.

Note the subtle adjustment of the metaphor. Not now is Israel a field of dry bones, but a corpse buried in a grave. In context, this vision is about the Babylonian captivity. God is saying that Babylon is Israel’s tomb, but he will break open the tomb and bring his people up, alive out of it. It is hard to conceive of a more vivid picturing of God’s sovereign action in bringing renewal to his people. When the Holy Spirit

comes, it is God’s free act; unprejudiced by the decision or will of the people. The dead have no will, no plan.

There is no indication in the entire passage of the Spirit coming in response to human action. The Spirit acts spontaneously, graciously, for reasons within God himself. The Holy Spirit’s coming does not create human prerogatives. It does not create life forms able to work with God as his equal. Instead, the Spirit produces a humanity, for whom God is everything; which acknowledges that there would be no life at all without the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit.

When he moved to bring his people up from their Babylonian grave, God used Ezekiel to proclaim the good news (37:4). It is the privilege of all believers to be heralds of God’s generosity to the world; his gift which can never be deserved, never be bought, never negotiated. By committing ourselves to this task we *“prophesy to the bones.”* We cooperate with the Spirit of God; we are caught up with him in his purpose to breathe life into our fellow men and women—and *they will live!*



God breathed life into Adam, so now the Spirit enlivens Israel’s bones.

LAW OF CHRIST; LAW OF THE SPIRIT; LAW OF LOVE.

It is then, the *“law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”* that liberates men and women from *“the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:2). For, Paul continues, God has done what the law could not do because of the powerlessness of the human nature on which it operated; he has sent his Son to accomplish a work as man and for man that could not have otherwise been accomplished, *“in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:3)....

The transition from the old age to the new—from the weakness of the “flesh” to the power of the Spirit—is brought about by the coming of Christ.... Paul goes on further to show that the law in its stricter sense, as the embodiment of God’s will, is upheld and fulfilled more adequately in the age of faith than was possible “before faith came,” when law kept the people of God “under restraint” (Galatians 3:23)....

If the law of the Spirit is the law of love then it is identical with what Paul calls elsewhere “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).... But the law of love is a different kind of law entirely from that which Paul describes as a yoke of slavery. Love is generated by an inner spontaneity and cannot be enforced by penal sanctions....

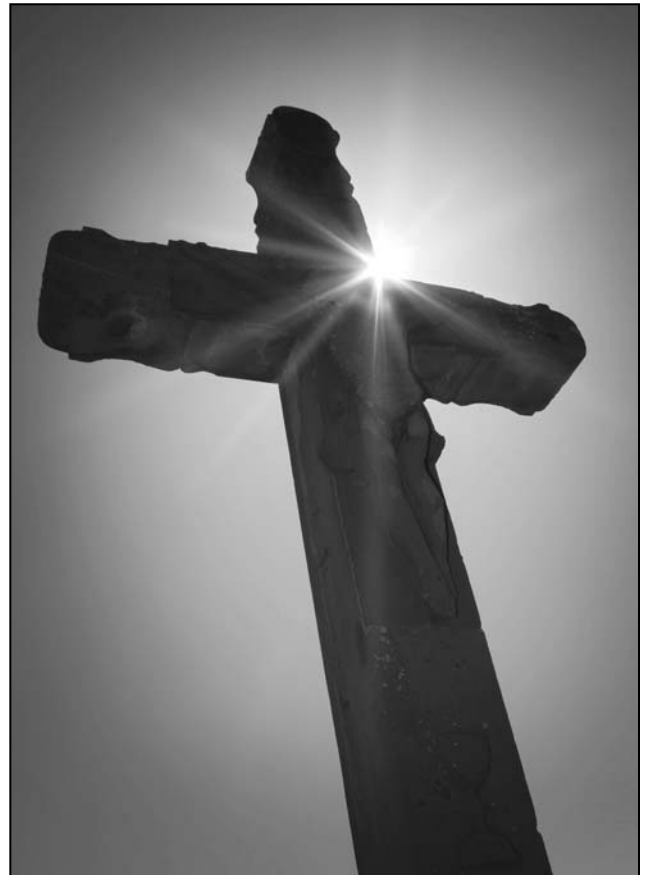


This insistence of the law of love, instead of prudential rules and regulations, was felt by many of Paul’s Christian contemporaries to come unrealistically near to encouraging moral indifferentism; and many Christians since his day have shared their sentiments....

But we should appreciate that Paul conforms no more to the conventions of religious people today than he conformed to the conventions of religious people around A.D. 50. It is best to let Paul be Paul. And when we do that, we shall recognize in him the supreme libertarian, the great herald; insisting that man in Christ has reached his spiritual majority, and must no longer be confined to the leading-strings of infancy, but enjoy the birthright of the freeborn sons of God. Here, if anywhere, Luther entered into the mind of Paul: “A Christian man is a most free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” “Subject to none” in

respect of his liberty; “subject to all” in respect of his charity. This, for Paul, is the law of Christ because this was the way of Christ. And in this way, for Paul, the divine purpose underlying Moses’ law is vindicated and accomplished.

-F.F. Bruce. PAUL: APOSTLE OF THE FREE SPIRIT.
pp.198-202. 



Some souls think that the Holy Spirit is very far away, far, far, up above. Actually he is, we might say, the divine person who is most closely present to the creature. He accompanies him everywhere. He penetrates him with himself. He calls him, he protects him, he makes of him his living temple. He defends him. He helps him. He guards him from all his enemies. He is closer to him than his own soul. All the good a soul accomplishes it carries out under his inspiration, in his light, by his grace and his help.

-Concepcion Cabrera de Armida.