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GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

ON BEING RIGHTEOUS

By Ron Allen (Concluded)

Romans 3:21 announces that the righteousness of God, which found expression in Christ, is “apart from law.” This is a way of saying that God’s righteousness is distinct from the human response to God; their worship, their religion, their lawfulness, or morality. God’s righteousness is what he is and does, not what people are, or what they do—no matter how devout. Notwithstanding the ‘apartness’ of the righteousness of God from the law, it is nevertheless the subject of the law’s testimony; the religion of Israel bears witness to it.

This is important because it teaches that the Old Testament served the interests of that which was greater than it. The Law and the Prophets indicated the way to the Sun of Righteousness, only to be outshone by it.

Christians find the gospel events (Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and exaltation), a superior moral supervisor; a most excellent treasury for spiritual succor, inspiration, instruction, and guidance.

The life of Jesus demands a corresponding newness in the religious life because the gospel revelation exceeds and excels what preceded it; hence Paul’s admonitions:

“...offer the parts of your body to him as **instruments of righteousness**” (Romans 6:13).

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in **slavery to righteousness**” (Romans 6:19).

This bondage to righteousness is expressed another way in Romans 7:6. There, Paul calls it serving God in the new way of the Spirit (as opposed to bondage to the law, a written code).

We miss something wonderful if we think that the law leads us to Christ, so that Christ will lead us back to the law. Not at all! Now that the gospel has come; now that righteousness (of God) has come, Christ the incarnate expression of that righteousness is the Christian center of devotion, motivation, and instruction. It is apart from law in order that God himself be the true interest and theme of Christianity; not human respectability, saintliness or moral achievement.

It was noted previously that anciently, people expected one another to act in certain ways within a given relationship.

Persons who fulfilled these expectations earned a reputation for being ‘righteous.’

In the Israel’s covenant relationship with God, his saving acts were understood as expressions of his righteousness. His repeated deliverances were his righteous acts. In this way, righteousness came to be associated with salvation. This idea seems to be present in third chapter of Romans. God is righteous as well as the giver of righteousness to the one who believes. He is “*righteous, and having salvation*” (Zechariah 9:9).

This aspect of righteous—righteousness as salvation, or righteousness as mercy, deserves attention when we think of the righteousness of God and its implications for our common life.

When Jesus arrived in 1st century Palestine, society was divided roughly into two groups; the *haberim*, a fellowship of scrupulous Jews dedicated to ritual purity and strict obedience

in tithing. Then there were the *amme ha-arez*—literally: *people of the land*.

Nothing too bad could ever be said by the *haberim* concerning the *amme ha-arez*. Since the latter were slack in attending to religious duties, they were regarded by the former as a public menace. They were to be avoided at all costs.

The *haberim* attendance upon

Continued on page 3



There, Paul calls it serving God in the new way of the Spirit...

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EDITORIAL . . .

“Return his cloak to him by sunset, so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 24:13).

In the patriarchal era, life was viewed as a succession of relationships. Each relationship bore its own claims on human behavior. A coat, taken as security by a money-lender, was to be given back by sundown so that the poor owner would not have to sleep cold. Conformity to this expectation was deemed to be an act of righteousness.

Another notable example of righteousness occurs in Genesis when Er, the son of Judah dies thus leaving Tamar, his wife, a widow. Judah instructs Tamar to go home and wait until one of his other sons, Shelah, is old enough to become her husband and raise up offspring for his dead brother.

Time passes, but Judah fails to keep his word. He does not give Shelah to be Tamar’s husband. She decides to take matters into her own hands. She disguises herself as a prostitute and waits for Judah to pass by. She succeeds in attracting his attention, but her disguise is successful. He does not recognize her. She seduces him and is soon pregnant with Judah’s child.


On hearing that Tamar is pregnant, Judah threatens to put her to death. Then she reveals to the community that Judah is the child’s father. Judah is forced into a public confession: “She is more righteous than I since I would not give her my son, Shelah” (Genesis 38:26). Tamar was “more righteous” because she was more faithful to the claims of family relationship which called for her to raise up an heir for her dead husband.

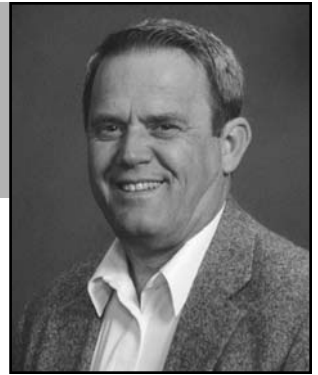
When catastrophe struck Job and his family, his friends assumed that he had been unrighteous. “You stripped men of their clothes, leaving them naked. You gave no water to the weary. You withheld food from the hungry” (Job 22:5-8). The ‘friends’ pictured Job’s assumed unrighteous behavior in terms of social failures. Job denied their charges; strenuously asserting his righteousness. “I have not rejoiced at my enemy’s

misfortune. I have always welcomed the traveler in my house. No stranger passing my dwelling has ever spent the night in the street” (Job 29-31).

Here was a righteousness expressed in relationships. The social element of righteousness is always in danger of being lost. There is a tendency among those who would be ‘godly,’ to rob righteousness of its rich sociological component. Jesus railed against the spiritual leaders of Israel because they had managed to achieve a righteousness that had little connection with the lives of the people. Theirs was a ‘gutted’ righteousness, enabling them to be religious but not responsible.

The relational nature of righteousness is implicit in the message of Jesus Christ. By means of his declaration of righteousness, God lays hold of sinners and places them in correct relation to himself; he justifies them. As a result, they have “peace with God” (Romans 5:1). The believer is established in ultimate relationship. He will realize and celebrate righteousness in the only way possible—in relationship to others.

God deliver us from a weak and private righteousness without passion and social concern. 



Pastor Ron Allen



More than leave the door ajar for his recalcitrant child to creep home through...

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SIN, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT

By Desmond Ford

The heart of the book of Romans, and the essence of its message, is found in 3:19-25. The paraphrase of the 'Living Bible' has it just right:

Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners.

But now God has shown us a different way to heaven—not by "being good enough" and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says he will accept and acquit us—declare us "not guilty"—if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we can all be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us "not guilty" of offending him if we trust in Jesus Christ, Who in his kindness, freely takes away our sins.

For God sent Christ to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from his wrath. In this way he was being entirely fair.

Among men, immediately upon the ascription of guilt comes the threat of judgment. Notice how merciful our God is. The text (John 16:8) does not say "sin and judgment," but "sin, righteousness and judgment." Those willing to take the gift of grace have no fear of judgment. They were judged in Christ (see John 5:24). But because we must be rescued from the power of sin as well as its guilt, Jesus tells us that the Spirit will convict regarding the dissolution of Satan's power. "The prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). The Day of

Judgment is no threat to the believer. We have already been judged and acquitted, and our enemy has been judged and overcome. Satan no longer has a claim on us, or power over us. We need never be haunted by the fear that we may one day perish at the hand of our great enemy. No, he has been judged and defeated. All is well and we are safe. (See John 10:28, 29).

If you study Romans closely you will find these seven successive themes of righteousness:

Righteousness required
Righteousness revealed
Righteousness reckoned
Righteousness received
Righteousness realized
Righteousness rejected
Righteousness reproduced

You can therefore sing with the poet:

I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice
And I have peace with God.

In Romans chapters 1-5 we find that we, by faith, are free from the wrath of God. In chapter six, we are free from the dominion of sin; in chapter seven, we are free from the law as a method of salvation; and in chapter eight we are free from death.

Romans makes it clear that when we commit ourselves to Christ, we receive the verdict of the last judgment immediately—that is what it means to be justified. It is the great Judge declaring us righteous right now. But as John's gospel clearly teaches, condemnation is also immediate if, upon hearing the gospel, we reject it. Judgment Day is today,

Continued on next page

Continued from page 1

the strict minutiae of the law was for them a life or death issue. They were appalled when Jesus displayed no discomfort at all in keeping company with individuals and groups from among the *amme ha-arez*. In fact, he seemed rather to delight in them. Such leniency towards those who were careless about the law was unforgivable.


In the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus addressed both the *Haberim* and the *amme ha-arez*. The runaway son represents the *amme ha-arez*. The elder son who stayed home was a good boy. He stands for the *haberim*. He kept his father's laws. But when his father welcomed home the prodigal, serious defects in the elder son became apparent. He was as hard as nails; judgmental, pitiless. He had no mercy in him.

Jesus was saying to the *haberim*, "this is what you are like." You meticulously observe the law, but you will not enter into the great mercy of God. You will not join with God in his eagerness to save sinners.

When Jesus portrayed God as extravagantly merciful, he

sounded a new note in the religious world. More than leave the door ajar for his recalcitrant child to creep home through, here was a God who searched hill and valley, scanned the horizon every day, sought the lost one, and welcomed home with joy and honor.

Such mercy speaks of God's righteousness. It was this righteousness that Jesus alluded to when he told the people that the 'kingdom of heaven' knew a righteousness that exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (*haberim*).

There are people, many of them in churches, whose religion leaves little room for 'the people of the land.' In truth, it keeps them away from the irreligious, the lawless, offenders, and prodigals. They have little to do with them. They do not befriend them or seek to understand them. To do so would put themselves at risk. In short, they are too busy being lawful to be merciful. Far too many are too good to be righteous. There is a need for Christians to develop a messianic ethic; one grounded in the definitive act of God by which he "declared his righteousness." 



with all its privileges and perils. Will we accept God's gift? Will we acknowledge that though we are worse than we ever suspected, God is better than we have ever hoped? Say it over and over again: "I don't have to be good to be saved; but I do have to be saved to be good." Salvation is not a matter of "who," but of "whose." Whose are you? To whom have you surrendered your heart?

-Desmond Ford: JESUS ONLY, pp. 113, 114. 

How Long, O Lord?

An Introduction to the Book of Daniel
by Dr. Desmond Ford

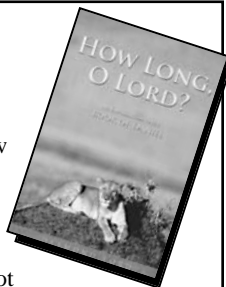
From the prophecies of Daniel flower all New Testament teachings about the future. Christ's final words about coming events (Matt. 24-25; Luke 21 and Mark 13) build on Daniel's predictions about "the abomination of desolation," "a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations," the "Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven," "the end coming like a flood," and the destruction of the temple and the end of the world. Our Lord's warning about nations in distress and perplexity (Luke 21:25) has its seed in the first great Apocalypse written by the captive seer in Babylon.

No other book in the Old Testament had such tremendous influence on the New Testament and the early Christian church. Scholars acknowledge that "apocalyptic was the mother of Christian theology."

Ours is an age desperately seeking a theodicy, a vindication of God's goodness and justice in the face of evil and the wisdom and benevolence of his ways. This Daniel provides. His prophecies understood, prove that the world is a ship and not an iceberg, and that human beings are not just the product of time plus chance plus mud. Here is an answer to existentialism, atheism, and post-modernism. Dr. Ford's book provides an interpretative summary of Daniel that will prove a key of untold value for all earnest Bible students.

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Whenever you put happiness before righteousness, you will be doomed to misery. That is the great message of the Bible from beginning to end. They alone are truly happy who are seeking to be righteous.

-D. Martin Lloyd-Jones

A Puritan is a person who pours righteous indignation into the wrong things.

-G. K. Chesterton

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

If I must choose between peace and righteousness, I choose righteousness.

Theodore Roosevelt

Country people tend to consider that they have a corner on righteousness and to distrust most manifestations of cleverness, while people in the city are leery of righteousness but ascribe to themselves all manner of cleverness.

-Edward Hoagland

But there remains the question, what righteousness really is: the method and secret and sweet reasonableness of Jesus.

-Mathew Arnold

THE FINAL ROLLERCOASTER

by Desmond Ford

We are all interested in the future, because that's where we are hoping to live. In the Bible, the special book about the future is the last one—the book of Revelation. It is often thought to be a mysterious book, but in fact it's a mosaic of over 500 Old Testament references. These references are the keys with which we may unlock the Apocalypse. Prominent in its forecasts are allusions to Jezebel and Elijah. Most have heard of the world's last conflict called Armageddon. But few realize that Armageddon cannot be understood without studying its Old Testament source — the histories of Ahab, Jezebel, Elijah at Mount Carmel, and the destruction of idolaters in the Kishon Valley (at Megiddo, which is the Hebrew root name for the Greek word Armageddon).

Desmond Ford has two doctorates, and two of his postgraduate degrees are in eschatology. He has written 10 books on Daniel and Revelation and lectured in many countries on these themes. Here, Ford focuses in on future events typified by the Old Testament stories of Elijah versus Jezebel. Central to this study are investigation into Antichrist and his attacks on the latter day church. Revelation's messages for an imperiled world are central in this book.

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