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# GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

## WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

By Ron Allen

The college I attended was run like a spiritual boot-camp. Worship was conducted at 7:00am and 7:00pm in both men's and women's dormitories, weekdays. It was compulsory. The roll was marked and anyone who slept in or was absent for whatever reason had to explain themselves to the Dean. Penalties were applied such as cancellation of leave privileges.

Not that leave privileges amounted to much. We were allowed two weekend absences from campus per semester; never on a 'girls' weekend' if you were a boy, and never on a 'boys' weekend if you were a girl. College viewed relations between the sexes with extraordinary vigilance. If a male youth began to display a restless interest in a female, he might procure permission to meet with her in a designated lawn area on campus. Physical contact was never tolerated.

There were strictly enforced dress codes. Girls had to submit to a hem length test to comply with a mandatory number of inches above the knee. Boys had to pass hair length examinations, and tight jeans were not allowed.

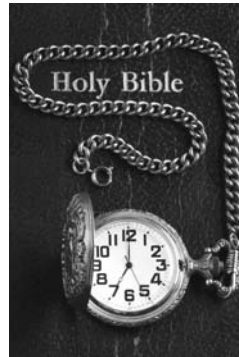
I enjoyed my time at college. It was run by dedicated people according to a Christian ideal enforced by a network of rules. While I enjoyed it, I am not persuaded—in retrospect—that the many regulations succeeded in achieving their aim.

In the first place, much of the enjoyment came from breaking the rules. I also know that the structured management of the sexes didn't work. Clandestine trysts were frequent, so the staff had to be on high alert at all times.

Compulsory chapel attendance did not instill love for God nor the worship of him. Many dormitory residents—in the tradition of prison inmates—were tireless in inventing ways to circumvent the roll-marking system.

Humans must face two inflexible truths: First, the world is not as it ought to be or as they would like it to be. Second, attempts to affect the ideal always fall short. Without exception, newly elected political leaders assume office with high-sounding rhetoric promising a new order; to the celebratory acclaim of voters eager for the new deal to begin. But before long, the euphoria is replaced with disillusionment, anger, and calls for another election.

The Great War fought in Europe from 1915 – 1918 was dubbed at the time: "The War to End All Wars." Almost ten



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million people were killed in that war. Until that time, the world had never seen states kill each other's citizens in such large numbers. So horrifying was it that nations recoiled from what they had done and set up the League of Nations to help prevent humanity from ever being so stupid again. But it was, it is, so stupid.

Sadly, humans cannot rule themselves. Even when they admit as much and set out to police themselves with highly regulated societies, they always subvert their own professed ideal.

In his second inaugural speech, Richard Nixon said: "We have a chance today to make life better in America.... to restore respect for law." Later, when Judge John Sirica listened to the Nixon Whitehouse Tapes, he heard President Nixon instructing his aides

to cover up the Watergate Crime. The judge remarked: "In a lifetime of watching a parade of people who robbed, killed, raped and deceived, I was still not hardened enough to hear with equanimity the low political scheming that was played back to me from the White House Offices." So much for 'respect for the law'; for 'making life better in America.'

If every structure, system, institution created by men and women is tainted with the germ of its own demise, is there any good reason why humans should make any effort at all to strive for ideals? Why not rather accept that our dreams are doomed; that the corruption of our hopes is the ultimate truth?

The Bible is wonderful in that it addresses this question. Unlike other sacred writings—and many secular ones—the Bible whole-heartedly accepts the blighted nature of humanity and its institutions. But it is not defeatist! Far from it. Deeply religious though it is, the Bible teaches that religion itself is not the answer to the vexed nature of existence. On the contrary, Scripture observes that noble endeavor, even when pursued in God's name, is ever betrayed by its human agents.

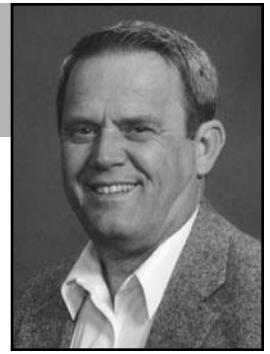
The Bible announces 'Good News' by indicating a religious perspective that goes beyond religion. In Acts 13, Paul arrives at Antioch in Pisidia. At the Synagogue he is invited to speak. He uses the occasion to review the history of his people, beginning from Abraham and passing through 450 years to the time of the Exodus. He then covers the period of the judges and the kings, moving quickly down to the time of King David

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# EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

*“You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it” (Acts 7:53).*

Thus did Stephen, the first Christian martyr, accused Israel’s pastors. It was a serious indictment, and far from welcome. It summarized the whole of Stephen’s address to the Sanhedrin on the occasion of his answering accusations made against him. Though Priest and Scribe made much of their devotion to the law, they were in truth, its enemies.

Recall Charles Dicken’s description of Mrs. Clenham’s Sunday morning face.

*Stern of face and unrelenting of heart, she sat behind a Bible—bound like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, straightest board, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the leaves—as if it, of all books, were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse.*

‘Stern of face’ and ‘unrelenting of heart!’ How is it that such characterizations come to be particularly appropriate when in reference to those who claim to know God and to teach others of him?

In charging Stephen, the Sanhedrin thought they were defending the Temple and protecting the Law housed therein. They saw themselves as standing up for the truth. Stephen claimed otherwise. He said that their zeal for the law had made

them responsible for the death of an innocent man—Jesus. Priests and elders said that Stephen was ‘speaking against God.’ Stephen said that priests and elders has betrayed and murdered the ‘Righteous One.’

The two perspectives were, and are still, mutually exclusive. They both cannot be correct. Either the Temple, the Law and its ancillary linked traditions are God’s highest expression of himself, and men are bound to conform, or Jesus is Christ, God’s Son, and all authority in heaven and earth is vested in him.

The Sanhedrin understood the implications of Stephen’s message. They realized that if Jesus really was God’s Son, Temple and Law would fade away. So they killed him. But even as they stoned him, Stephen turned his face toward heaven and pleaded God’s forgiveness on their behalf.

In every generation, Christ and law vie with one another for mankind’s exclusive allegiance. Many, following in Stephen’s steps, have become lovers of the human race; ministers of God’s mercy. On the other hand, many ‘Temple advocates’, ‘stern of face and unrelenting of heart,’ have thought it right and good to urge law upon mankind; to its detriment—and their own.



*Continued from previous page*

which brings him to David’s descendant—Jesus Christ.

For Paul, Israel’s story is preeminently one of God’s doings. For example: **God chose our fathers (verse 17). God caused Israel to prosper in Egypt (verse 17). God led Israel out of that country (verse 17). God overthrew the Canaanite nations and gave the land to Israel (verse 19). God gave Israel judges (verse 20). God let Israel have King Saul (verse 21). God removed Saul and gave them David as king (verse 22).**

Paul’s view is that God exists, and he cares about what happens in human affairs. Intending that human society be of a particular kind, he intervenes in order to affect his intention. The history of Israel demonstrates this proposition.

But God does not have things all his own way. His chosen people act in ways that frustrate his design. Paul notes this: **God endured their**

**conduct forty years (verse 18).** He had to remove the people’s choice (Saul) and replace him with his own anointed. **He will do everything I want him to do (verse 22).** But even David didn’t do everything God wanted him to do. He messed up, and within a short time, his once great kingdom was in ruins.

But God acted again: **“From David’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior who he has promised” (verse 23).** What God had willed to happen under David’s reign, would come to pass in his descendant—Jesus.

The Old Testament can be viewed as an account of Israel under the Law of Moses; a nation organized according to a charter of moral decency and civil order given by God. Its storyline is that of a people blessed with advantages of divine enlightenment, patronage, and guidance. Yet, for all that, it is a tale of serial fiasco, foolishness and moral weakness, all overspread—it should be said—by God →



*The Law of Moses could not do that.*

## GOODNEWS Unlimited

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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.

Good News Unlimited magazine also seeks to keep readers up-to-date on all aspects of GNU’s ministries. This includes news on national and international radio broadcasts; public seminars, congresses, and Bible schools within the USA (as well as

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recurring gracious interventions to salvage the situation and preserve hope.

Now Paul is ready for his punch-line: “*We tell you the good news: what God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus from the dead*” (verse 32). He goes on: “*Therefore my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses*” (verse 38).

We come to Paul’s signature way of expressing the gospel. His two central affirmations are here:

1) Failure of the most spiritually favored people on earth to achieve God’s kingdom. The law of Moses with corollary interpretive developments did not establish the looked-for paradise. 2) God’s intervention in Jesus underlines and makes provision for that total failure by being all grace. It is dominated by forgiveness.

Jim, the Runaway, sits weeping, head in hands. Huckleberry Finn asks him, “What’s the matter?”

“My poor little Lisbeth,” he moans. He speaks of his four-year-old daughter whom he may never see again. “I said to her, ‘Shut de door. But she didn’t mind me. I said it again, ‘Shut de door.’ She just looked up at me smilin’ and makin’ her baby noises.

‘I’ll make you mind me,’ I said. Then I fetched her a whack on the side of her head to send her sprawlin.’ Then I went out. When I came back in the door was still open and Lisbeth was standin’ in the doorway, tears runnin’ down her face. I was just goin’ to slap her again when the wind blew the door shut behind her with a terrible loud bang. The child didn’t move. That near enough took my breath away. Then I bust out crying and took that little girl in my arms and held her. She was plumb def and dumb, Huck; plumb def and dumb, and an’ I bin treatin’ her so.”

With firmness, supported by a clear sense of right of wrong, Jim sought to establish his fatherly rule in the life of his daughter. He applied his remonstrance, threats and warnings, till he had used them all up to no effect; till he realized the tragic truth that the only dealings appropriate for this child were dealings of understanding and compassion.

So with God. He comes to the world as he has done so many times before, only to find mankind—even under the constraints and supervisions of religion—in a state of non-attainment. In the past, God’s disciplines and warnings have been ‘tinged’ with mercy. Like Jim he has been willing to reiterate his instructions. But in Christ there is none of that. No more reproaches, no more ‘what have you done?’ no more ‘I’ll make you mind me.’ No more giving of notice, just forgiveness, full and free.

Forgiveness is expressed as ‘justification’ in Acts 13: 38, 39. Forgiveness usually carries the idea of covering or canceling anger. But justification goes further. A justified individual is deemed to have done nothing to offend in the first place. It means being entitled to all the privileges of an individual who never did anything wrong. The Law of Moses could not do that.

It will be recognized that justification goes a good way past what most people mean when they think of forgiveness. They usually mean: “I’ll let you off this time, but I won’t forget.” In the story of the prodigal son, the older brother is incensed because of the royal treatment his father bestows on the ‘black




*Mercy has triumphed over judgment.*

sheep’ of the family. He is offended because the father treats the prodigal as if he has done nothing wrong.

Yes, it is offensive isn’t it! We don’t like to see forgiveness taken to such lengths. We want the letter of the law applied; especially to those who haven’t behaved as well as we have. But if the letter of the law had been applied to the prodigal, he would have been lost to the family.

Unless there is a God who goes far beyond what the best religions offer, there can be no hope for anybody. More pressing than any other need of ours, is the need to know that God holds nothing against us; that he has not just let us go with a warning, but

he has reservations about forgiving us; that he has residual feelings of having been let down and therefore being owed something by us. We really need to know that God accepts us in his family as if we had never done anything wrong.

“We bring you Good News,” says Paul. Part of that good news is the disclamation of the law—of all laws. There is hope for humanity because law has been supplanted. Mercy has triumphed over judgment. From within the treasure-house of his excellent personality, God has brought out to us in his Son Jesus, mercy so far-reaching and complete as to cut us loose once and for all from the mechanism of our defeat. 

## ***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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# FROM DEATH TO LIFE

By Desmond Ford

We all have regrets. We all have, not just one, but several skeletons in the closet. The respected Rabbi who wept on reading the verse: *“God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing”* (Ecclesiastes 12:14) was not different from the members of his flock. After all, who enjoys going to court as the star figure?



*A dog may steal a string of sausages from the meat counter, but no thought of judgment ever prompts it to return the stolen goods.*

## Fear of Death.

Then we have that other disquieting, intuitive conviction—that life is limited and death is certain. Here, again, we differ from animals. A dog may steal a string of sausages from the meat counter, but no thought of judgment ever prompts it to return the stolen goods. Neither do we have evidence that any creature other than man has enjoyment of day and night lessened by fear of inevitable death. But for us, every question we have ever asked about life is multiplied by the fact of unrelenting death, despite the paradox, that simultaneously, man believes he was not made to die.

Many writers have spelled out the connection between our instinctive fears of death and judgment. After the bloody dissipation of the glory of the Athenian Empire, Epicurus wrote that ‘what men fear is not that death is annihilation, but that it is not.’ Richard Neibuhr echoed these sentiments toward the close of World War II when he reminded his readers that the fear of death was chiefly the result of that other fear—the premonition of judgment. Daniel Webster said that the most significant thought ever to cross his mind was that of his personal accountability to God.

The marvel is that we are not more fearful than we are. Naked, defenseless, feeble and alone, birth plunges us into the whirlpool of life. All kinds of evils foam and swirl about us—some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible. God, God’s universe, God’s messenger—death—these are the facts of life. For “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this, the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).



*Life is short and death is certain. And what then?*

## Turning a Blind Eye.

There is of course a way of escape which the majority of men have embraced. Like Nelson, who placed his telescope to his blind eye in order not to see the signal to retreat at the Battle of Copenhagen, we too can refuse to acknowledge every signal from within and without regarding ultimate reality. Rare is the modern novel or play which discusses natural death. Brutal death is acceptable in large quantities, but not that which is the inevitable lot of all men. The experts in cosmetics are now doing their best for their toughest customer, until the gullible almost come to believe that death is passing through a door in an ivy wall separating one garden from another.

## After Death. What?

But facts are facts nonetheless. Life is short and death is certain, and what then? Ask Epicurus. Ask Richard Neibuhr. Ask the writer of Hebrews (9:27) *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Did you notice that we have now passed the peak of

melancholy? The bad news has been sketched; now for the good news. Some of it, yes most of it, was hidden in the verse just quoted. Who is this Judge of all the earth before whom each of us must stand? The text referred to the judgment seat of ‘Christ.’ Did you ever think about that? *“The father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son”* (John 5:22).

The same story is also found in Romans 2:16: *“God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.”* A major part of the good news is that One with our human nature, our Elder Brother, is to be our judge.

## No Condemnation.

The Crucified One is to be the judge of sinners. Good news indeed! This is where the judgment differs from the tribunals of our day. It is not to be just an indictment of sins committed. In fact, the real issue is not the sin question primarily, but the Son question. The Judge himself has declared, *“Whoever believes in him (Christ) is not condemned; but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).*

What right has the creator of a moral universe to act in this manner? On what grounds can he pass over the sins of men and give eternal life to the guilty. The answer is the very heart of the gospel. God’s judgment on son, his wrath against it, has already taken place. Christ who ‘had no sin’ was made to be sin itself for us, ‘that we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God’s law, being a description of his own character, could neither be flouted nor revoked. Its penalty had to be paid. But who would have thought that God himself would pay it. This is the essence of those glad tidings which William Tyndale declared should make every believer sing and dance for joy.

## The Good News.

Sang Charles Wesley, ‘Believe, believe the record true. Pardon for all flows from his side, my Lord my love is crucified.’ Only this can explain those mysterious sections of the gospel narrative which tell us of the intensity of Christ’s mental anguish when he sweat great drops of blood and later cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” It was not the fear of death that explains Christ’s agony; it was the awareness that he was suffering for the sins of the human race. He was forsaken of God—or so it seemed—that we might not be. He cried, “Why,” in order that we might never need to cry it.

The lighting bolts of judgment struck the innocent Son of God in order that the guilty might find safety at the seared site of Calvary. It is no travesty of justice. The immutable law of God was more honored by the death of the infinite Son than if the whole human race had perished. Furthermore, he who receives the blood-bought righteousness cannot remain as he was. His look to Christ justifies but his gaze sanctifies.

And therefore it is written: *“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”* (John 5:24). 