

GOOD NEWS

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Grace Alone

The Kindness of God Brings You Salvation

EDITORIAL . . .

I tell you that one greater than the temple is here (Matthew 12:6).

The Pharisees had confronted Jesus, accusing his disciples of desecrating the Sabbath by plucking grain. While purporting to keep faith alive, these serious-minded people had begun to destroy it with sterile practices, and routine procedures. To them, Jesus said, "One greater than the temple is here."

It was a shocking thing to say to ardent religionists. It was an offensive thing to say to people whose life revolved around the temple with its elaborate rituals and laws. There is no way around the sharpness of Jesus' critique. He was castigating the contraptions by which men and women seek to gain control of God; to secure his services, and guarantee his favor.

The temple of pious practices and sophisticated symbols must be seen for what it is—a mere shadow of something far greater. God cannot be contained by our religious forms, nor can he be managed by them. If we think so, we have repeated an age-old mistake. That temple must be torn down to make way for Jesus Christ.

Contrary to what many have thought, faith does not come through doctrines, creeds, institutions, and forms. Its origins are more mundane. It is born in the fact that men and women must live. They have to live in a universe that drives them to ask questions. What am I? Who is this person that I call me? Am I the sum of these wild impulses within myself, or am I really the noble creature I sometimes aspire to be? Why do I do things I despise, and why do I seek the destruction of those who offend me? Why am I here at this time, in this particular place, and not here at some other time and place? Can I be free of the many things that

bind me, spirit and body?—guilt, fear, despair? Why is there so much pain?

Questions like these are the furnace out of which the golden treasure of faith is forged. The one who wrote: "In the beginning God. . . ." would not have done so if he had not first pondered why there was life. The Psalmist would not have sung, "The Lord is my shepherd," unless he had struggled with fear and futility. Job affirmed, "I know that my redeemer lives," after he struggled with the miseries of pain and injustice. Faith comes as men and women encounter God, in the questions raised by existence itself.

When Jesus said, "One greater than the temple is here," he was drawing attention to himself as a surpassing religious center; a personal worship place, to which men and women might repair with their questions and longings. No other figure more thoroughly bespeaks human experience, than Jesus—especially on his cross. Naked, shamed, wounded in body, and tortured in spirit, he cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Down into the abyss he goes, but in three days, he rises.

This is why Jesus is greater than all other holy places, holy people and holy things. In him, questions, pain, even death become shining portals in the gloom. Utter calamity is transformed into utter blessing. The moment of despair is the birthplace of faith. May Jesus Christ, be Lord.



Ron Allen

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Chosen by Grace

by Ron Allen

1



The Bible tells of the saving acts of God in the history of the world. Those acts are always tinged with grace. Grace—the word—occurs many times throughout Scripture. In modern versions, it is frequently translated: "kindness." Kindness in a particular setting. It is the favor shown by someone in a position of strength to another person who is powerless.

Christians easily think of grace in connection with Jesus Christ. They have taken their cue from the first Christians who were delighted and amazed to learn so much about God's grace from Jesus. This, in contrast to their previous religious life, which was shaped largely by conceptions of law.

Though early Christians expressed their awareness of something new and exciting in Jesus, in terms of Law versus Grace, it should be understood that the New Testament appreciation of grace, is very much shaped by Old Testament thought. The apostle Paul's great statements about the grace of God in Christ, grew out of insights that had long been the heritage of Jewish people. This is certainly the case where Paul discusses grace in terms of God's having 'chosen' those whom he would have serve him.

For an example, take the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, where Paul begins with a familiar form of introduction: "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God. . . .*" (Ephesians 1:1).

Here is a man who believes that his life situation; his vocation, is not something that has happened as a result of his own dedication and resolve. The cause and explanation for Paul's Christian witness is to be found in God.

Paul was forever telling how God had taken over his life, at a time when he was active against God. The initiative had come from the divine side. God had chosen Paul; transforming an enemy into a friend. An apostle of Jesus Christ, "*by the will of God.*" This is one of the meanings of grace. God acts unilaterally. His kindness is not drawn out of him by the sorry state of those who will be its beneficiaries.

When I began to court Carmen (now my wife), it was a ritual of maneuvers. We were both on a college campus at the time. What a game of cat and mouse! Every time I walked out of my dorm to cross the open spaces to any other building, my head was full of strange ideas and questionings. "Where is *she*? How do I look? Am I striding purposefully? Is my masculinity sufficiently obvious? Should I take this route, or another? Will she see me? Will I impress, or will she think I am ridiculous? What do I care, anyhow?! etc.

All human relationships are transactional to some degree.

We constantly monitor each other's responses; seeking for signals which are encouraging, or otherwise. This is our way. But in grace, God is not responding to 'vibes' that he is getting from us. He is acting in an unencumbered fashion. Grace means that God is free from us in a way that we are never entirely free from each other.

There is something kingly about God's style, in grace. "*For he chose us in him, before the creation of the world. . . to the praise of his glorious grace*" (Ephesians 1:4-6). When I was in my early school years, the teacher would take all the boys to the playing field, for sports. He would nominate two boys as captains. Then he would say: "You two boys pick your team from the rest." The newly appointed captains could scarcely manage their pride. It went straight to their heads, their being captains, and having so much power. So, while the rest of the group would jump up and down; clamouring, and gesturing, as if to say, "Pick me, pick me," the two captains would take their time, relishing their unalloyed liberty to lay claim to, or dispose of their classmates, at their very own whim.

It made no difference at all when some boys begged to be chosen, and still no difference if some tried not to be chosen. The captains were sovereign. God's grace is like this. His grace implies his independence. God is not beholden to anyone. He has no favors to return; no debts to pay. Theologians have called this aspect of God's grace 'election,' or 'distinguishing grace.' It is everywhere to be found in the Old Testament, and echoed here by Paul. Grace involves God's autonomy in choosing servants to himself.

"*The Lord has chosen you out of all the peoples of the earth, to be his people. . . . The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest*" (Deuteronomy 7:6+7).

"*It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for my holy name's sake*" (Ezekiel 36:22).

Scripture is well stocked with language to indicate that the origins of faith, hope, and love, are in God, and not in those who have faith, or who hope and love. Faith, hope, and love, are not gifts we bring to God, but gifts of grace, from him to us. Human beings are not free moral agents to the same degree as God is. If God had not chosen Saul, the terrorist, he would never have become Paul, the Christian. Election means that if God, in kindness, did not initiate relationship with human life, men and women would not be free to believe in him, and love him, nor would they want to. "*God's kindness leads you to repentance*" (Romans 2:4)



Chosen by Grace

by Ron Allen

2




*For he chose us **in him**, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons, through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious **grace**, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. Ephesians 1:3-6*

So far removed from being coaxed out of him, is God's kindness, that Paul can think of God having been kind to us even before we existed. Imagine a time, before time. A time when God was there all by himself, when there were no worlds; no earth, no life-sustaining atmosphere; no people. Before our ancestors were here. Then, when the only self-consciousness there was, was God; when there was no one else for God to see, relate to, or be influenced by, then, God chose us. Long before we came on the scene, God showed his grace toward us. He set his love on us in advance, by choosing us in connection with someone else. In his mind, he put us together with Christ. He adopted us.

In the Roman empire, fathers were very powerful. A father

had all power over his children. He could sell his child as a slave, if he wished. He could scourge his child, put him in prison, or have him executed. In this environment adoption was a serious step. A strict ritual was followed, in which the adopting father would purchase the child from his current father. Then the adopting father was obliged by law to sell the child back to his erstwhile father. After that, the adopting parent had to signal again his intention to adopt by buying the child a second time. But yet again, he was required to sell back to the antecedent father. Only when the child had been bought for the third time, did the first father have no leave to buy his offspring back again. The new owner then had to appear in court, and plead his case to keep the child. When the court had finally agreed, the adoption process was complete. The child lost all rights in his previous family, he inherited all the rights of his new one. By choosing him and adopting him, the new father had virtually made of the child, a new person.

When God chose us in the Son of his love, before the world was made, he thereby made us his very own. All the rights and privileges pertaining to the Son, became ours. This action took place in God's mind, in the eternity of the past—to the praise of his glorious grace. Christianity is a religion of grace; a religion based on God's kindness. 

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Chosen by Grace

A Parable of Electing Grace

by Ron Allen

3



“On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood, I said to you, “Live!” Later I passed by and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you, and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath, and entered into a covenant with you, declares the sovereign Lord, and you became mine” (Ezekiel 16: 4-8).


The history of God's relationship with Israel is summarized in this moving parable. Infanticide was common in the ancient world, and here Israel's condition when God first involved himself with them, is pictured as that of an abandoned child. The child has been cast aside from the moment it left the womb. No attempt has been made to clean it and swaddle it. Those who might have been expected to care

for it, do not. This babe is born into a world of indifference. The only emotion it has ever felt is rejection. In the heat of the day, flies will be attracted to the blood and birth fluids. The night will bring freezing temperatures. There is no hope. The babe is as good as dead.

Severed from every possible means of comfort and support; friendless, and doomed, the child waits to die, but God appears, and commands the infant to live. Later in the story, the metaphor changes. The babe has now become a beautiful maid. God passes by a second time, and Boaz-like, betroths her to himself. "You became mine," he says.

Grace is very powerful. Without it human beings would never be able to enjoy a relationship with God. Grace has creative power. It brings life out of death. Men and women have no way, of themselves, of creating spiritual life. They cannot any more discover God and force him to reveal himself to them, than could an abandoned newborn child.

He who set his kindness upon us in eternity; choosing us, and putting us together with Christ, is also very kind to us in time. We do not come to him, he comes to us, and when we are without strength; even when we are dead in weaknesses, and guilt; while we are yet sinners, he draws us to himself with cords of love. He adopts us; puts us in his family. He betroths us to himself. He enters into covenant with us. We become his.

If this is what God's grace is like, it means that we ought not think of Christianity from the perspective of our will; our determination, and our choice. Rather, from the point of view of God's choice, his will, and purpose. Our whole life, including our spirituality, comes from God, and is in his hands. It is ours to receive, and to trust.. 

Grace is very powerful. Without it human beings would never be able to enjoy a relationship with God. Grace has creative power. It brings life out of death.

GRACE ABOUNDING. . .

Excerpts from John Bunyan's book, written from prison.

"Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners" is the story of Bunyan's religious experience. He tells of his rebellion against God, his struggles with guilt, and his breakthrough into assurance through the grace of God.

There was nothing that I longed for more, than to find out once and for all if there was any hope for me or not. Then these words came rolling into my mind: "Will the Lord cast off forever? And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail forevermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (Psalm 77:7-9). All the while these questions were running through my mind, I felt that the very fact that they were questions indicated that he surely had not cast off forever, but would be favorable. . .

. . . Then as I was again at prayer, and trembling under fear that no word of God could help me, the words came upon me, "My grace is sufficient," and I felt hopeful. And yet, just about two weeks before, I had been reading this very verse, and at that time, I thought that it was of no help nor comfort to me at all. In fact I threw down the book with impatience, for I thought it was not large enough for me. But again it seemed as if this verse had arms of grace so wide that it could not only enclose me, but many more besides. . . .

. . . This Scripture also helped me: "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Oh, the comfort that I had through this word, "in no wise." Satan tried hard to pull this promise away from me, saying that Christ did not mean me, that he spoke of sinners that had not done the same thing as I had. But I would answer him, "Satan, there is no exception in these words. 'Him that comes' means any 'him.'" As I look back on this experience, I remember that Satan never once put this further question to me: "But do you come aright?" And I think the reason was that he was afraid I would be reminded that to come aright was to come as I was, a vile and ungodly sinner, and to cast myself at the feet of mercy. If ever Satan and I strove about anything in the Bible, it was over this word from the Gospel of John. And, God be

praised, I overcame him, and got sweetness from the verse. . . .


. . . One day, as I was passing into the field, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul: "Thy righteousness is in heaven." And I thought I could see Jesus Christ at God's right hand. Yes, there indeed was my righteousness, so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say about me, that I did not have righteousness, for it was standing there before him.

I also saw that it was not my good feelings that made my righteousness better, and that my bad feelings did not make my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). . . .

. . . I gloried to see his exaltation, and the wonders of his benefits which he bestowed so readily. I saw that all those graces of God, that belonged to me, but which I showed so little, were like those few coins that rich men used to carry in their purses while their gold was in their trunks at home. I saw that my gold was in my trunk at Home—in Christ my Lord and Savior. Now Christ was all—all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.

Moreover, the Lord also led me into the mystery of union with the Son of God, and I saw that I was joined to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. And if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now I could see myself in heaven and earth at the same time; in heaven by my Christ, my head, my righteousness, and my life; and on earth by my own body.

I saw that we fulfilled the law by him, died by him, rose from the dead by him, got the victory over sin, death, the devil and hell by him. When he died, we died, and so it was also with his resurrection. . . .

John Bunyan: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.
(pp. 72-81) 

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BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

by C.H. Spurgeon

What an abyss is the grace of God! Who can measure its breadth? Who can fathom its depth? Like all the rest of the divine attributes, it is infinite. . . . Right well remember this, or you may fall into the error by fixing your minds so much upon the faith which is the channel of salvation, as to forget the grace which is the fountain and source, even of faith itself. Faith is the work of God's grace in us. No man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy Ghost. "No man cometh unto me," saith Jesus, "except the father which hath sent me draw him." So that faith, which is coming to Christ, is the result of divine drawing. Grace is the first and last moving cause of salvation. And faith, essential as it is, is only an important part of the machinery which grace employs. We are saved "through faith," but salvation is "by grace."

. . . Never make a Christ out of your faith, nor think of it as if it were an independent source of your salvation. Our life is found in "looking unto Jesus," not in looking to our own faith. By faith all things become possible to us, yet the power is not in the faith, but in the God upon whom faith relies. Grace is the locomotive engine, and faith is the chain by which the carriage of the soul is attached to the great motive power. The righteousness of faith is not the moral excellence of faith, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which faith grasps, and appropriates. The peace within the soul is not derived from the contemplation of our own faith; it comes to us from him who is our peace, the hem of whose garment faith touches, and virtue comes out of him, into the soul.

See then, dear friend, that the weakness of your faith will not destroy you. A trembling hand may receive a golden gift. The Lord's salvation can come to us though we have only faith as a grain of mustard seed. The power lies in the grace of God, and not in our faith. Great messages can be sent along slender wires, and the peace-giving witness of the Holy Spirit can reach the heart by means of a thread-like faith which seems almost unable to sustain its own weight. Think more of HIM to whom you look, than of the look itself. You must look away, even from your own looking, and see nothing but Jesus, and the grace of God revealed in him. 



WHEN GRACE IS NO LONGER GRACE

by Ron Allen

When I was nine years old, I asked my Dad to teach me to milk. He used to milk two cows every morning to keep our family supplied. After I learned to milk, the job became mine, and I wished I had never learned. Rain or shine, the cows had to be milked. I was not a good milkman.

One wet morning, when the cows were in a particularly bad mood, I returned to the house, with not much milk in my bucket. I knew that I would be the subject of questioning and complaint from the rest of the family. They liked their milk for breakfast, and they were not slow to express their dissatisfaction when they didn't get it. What to do?

At the rear of the house was a rainwater tank. It came into view as I was passing. Without faltering, I held the bucket beneath the tap, turned the water on, and proceeded into the kitchen with my now respectable load of fresh milk.

Next morning, when we were eating our cereal, my sister looked hard at her plate, then at me, and called out: "This water has got milk in it!" I was sprung. I had to cop it sweet.

In Romans 11:5+6, Paul speaks of a remnant chosen by grace. "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works. If it were, grace would no longer be grace." In Romans, 'works' is shorthand for human effort of any kind, with a view to securing and maintaining the soul in safe relation to God. Works stand for a spirituality that focuses on the human response to God, in all its myriad guises, and forms. In Paul's thinking, activity and effort of this kind is contrary to grace. It can never be mixed with grace, or placed by it as a supplement. So to do, would be to cause grace to be emptied of its defining character. The milk would stop being milk, and become water instead. Grace would take on the nature of its supplement, and would, therefore, no longer be grace.

On this issue, Paul is uncompromising. He will not yield an inch. The gospel must be **all** of grace, or there is no grace; there is no gospel. The dominating characteristic of the Christian religion is God's powerful kindness.

Note the reasoning in the following passage. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing: (Galatians 2:21). These are the

words of a man describing what it means for him to be a Christian. He sees himself as having somehow been included in Christ's death (v. 20). Now, he lives out of an entirely new standpoint. He can describe it this way: "I no longer live, Christ lives in me" (v. 20).

The centerpiece of Paul's new life is Christ, who died for him. That is now the all-consuming theme of his existence. To have any spiritual point of reference other than Christ crucified, would be to set aside (nullify, or frustrate), grace. For many Jews, certainly for the Galatians, the law was seen as the appropriate focus for the religious life. But Paul will have none of it. If a relationship with God could be secured by seeking to order personal life according to its (the law's) requirements—Christ died for nothing. There would be no need for grace.


One more example of Paul's teaching about the sovereign role of grace in Christian experience: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Scholars speculate about the true nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Some say it was a painful soreness of the eyes. Some say that it was a bodily ailment that was disgusting to look at (Galatians 4:12-14). Whatever it was, it was disastrous. The image that he uses to picture it is that of a man, trying to get on with his life; meet his responsibilities, while being helplessly impaled on a wooden stake.

Understandably, he wanted God to remove this curse from him. He besought God repeatedly, and the answer given him was: "My grace is sufficient for you." God was telling Paul, "My action, and work in the world, will most easily be known—not through your talents, expertise, or skills, but in the least impressive aspects of your personality. In fact, your handicap, your disability, will be the foil through which the might of my great kindness will be known."

The weaker the man, the more conspicuous God's power. From a natural and reasonable human standpoint, Paul's problem was a hindrance to his ministry. But from grace's point of view, it only made him more effective.

The difference between a religion borne of the gospel, and all other religions, is that the gospel has grace. The secret of Christianity's power lies here. Grace is about the working of God in his infinite kindness. Paganism is about human striving, human excellence, human virtue, human genius. The secret of a rewarding and fruitful spirituality is expressed in the paradox: "when I am weak, then I am strong." The secret of a failed and useless spirituality can be stated in the reverse paradox: "When I am strong, then I am weak." In all things religious, and therefore in all things secular, GRACE is sufficient. What makes for a satisfying religious life, is a prevailing concentration on the work of God, rather than a damaging obsession with the work we do for him.

Let me no more, my comfort draw,
From my frail hold on thee.
In this alone rejoice with awe,
Thy mighty grasp of me. 

The Gospel and the Spirit

3

The Spirit Arrives

(Acts 2:1-21)

by Rodney Nelson

The time of fulfillment.

Pentecost is the Jewish celebration of the harvest, also known as the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). The countdown to Pentecost began on the first day after Passover Sabbath. On that day, the firstfruits' offering of barley was given. Fifty days later, an offering of new grain would be given on the first day after the seventh Sabbath (Leviticus 23:15). In Christian terms, Pentecost represents the giving of the firstfruits of the Spirit—a precursor of the final redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). Jesus is called "the firstfruits of those that have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). For Christians, Pentecost represents the harvest to come at the resurrection.

Pentecost also stands for a time of beginnings. In Acts 2, it is traditionally seen as the beginning of the church. The church began in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that the Spirit would come (Acts 1:4). More importantly, it was a transition time in salvation history. At Pentecost, a new page in God's plan for saving people began. This is indicated by the expression, Pentecost "came" (2:1). It means completed, in the sense of fulfillment. The same word is in Luke 9:51, where Jesus set out to go up to Jerusalem because "the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven." Pentecost was the God-ordained time for the church to be empowered for ministry; thus beginning the harvest of souls that would culminate with the resurrection.

Batten down the hatches.

Probably a tornado would come close to describing the sound of the violent wind, heard by the believers. While sitting, they saw "what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated, and came to rest on each of them." All were filled with the Holy Spirit, which was manifest in their speaking in other languages. This was an outpouring of God's grace, experienced in a new way, even though wind and fire are not alien to Scripture. (Wind: Exodus 14:21; Fire: Exodus 3:2, 19:18, 1 Kings 18:38+39.)

Babel in reverse.

Thousands of "God-fearing" Jews were gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. They represented every nation of the Diaspora

(vv. 9-11). The common language, for this time, would be Aramaic or Greek. However, they were hearing the native tongue of their homelands. It would have been impossible for Galilean disciples to have known so many languages (vv. 7+8). It was Babel in reverse. Rather than confusing the languages, God overcame the linguistic barriers. Scripture does not state what was said by the 120 to the Jews, in their own tongue, other than to say that they "heard the wonders of God" (v.11). There is no record that the gift of tongues was used to preach the gospel. Rather, it appears to have been a sign of God's presence. Perhaps it was meant to get people's attention so that Peter could speak to them in a language they could all understand. At the very least, tongues, at Pentecost, was a catalyst, not the focus itself, preliminary to the preaching of the gospel.

Peter explains the miracle.

The only explanation some could come up with, was drunkenness (v. 13). However, excessive wine drinking could not explain what was occurring. How typical it is of sinful man to seek to explain away the inexplicable. Even in the face of an overwhelming demonstration of God's power, some still mocked.

Peter addressed the crowd, reassuring them that what they were seeing was the work of God, and not man (vv. 15+16). Indeed, it was a fulfillment of Scripture (Joel 2:28-32). First, it was a prophecy signifying that God would pour out his Spirit on all people. Prior to this, God anointed certain individuals with his Spirit. Now, all people would be indwelt by the Spirit. Secondly, the outpouring knew no gender, class, age, or ethnic boundaries. It truly signified that all people are God's people. Third, they would prophesy, not speak in tongues. The baptism of the Spirit would primarily be seen in the empowerment of individuals to prophesy, or proclaim the word of God.

Speaking in tongues would not be the means of spreading the gospel, but an indication of a greater work. (See 1 Corinthians 14:5.) Tongues were a sign to get the attention of unbelievers, while prophecy would be for believers. (1 Corinthians 14:22). Through the prophesying of believers, unbelievers would be convicted of their sin (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Tongues were a means to an end, not the end itself. →

THE DELAYS OF LOVE 4

by Desmond Ford

FAITH TEACHES US HOW TO WAIT

Peter's story.

Remember the story of Peter, recorded in Acts chapter twelve? It had been determined by Herod, the tyrant, that he would bring forth Peter on a certain day, and execute him as he executed James. But on the last night of the last week, the angel of the Lord invaded that prison, and took Peter out. The record says that Peter was sleeping! I don't think that I would have been sleeping had I known my head would roll the next day. But Peter knew his Lord, intimately, and he rested in him.

Hezekiah and Sennacherib.

In the Old Testament there is a story of how the host of Sennacherib came up against Israel. They threatened the Jews, and Hezekiah went in before God, and spread out an appeal. He showed the threatening letter, and admitted that he had no might, but that God had all power. "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred, fourscore and five thousand: and . . . in the morning, behold, they were all dead" (1 Kings 19:35). The deliverance was delayed, but it came on time.

Jacob's long wait.

Consider afresh, the story of Jacob. He said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (Genesis 49:18). He had known what it was to wait seven years for his wife, and then to get the wrong wife! He waited another seven years for the wife of his heart. He had known what it was to lose his beloved son, and to wait

through the years for the explanation of the mystery of the missing Joseph. But there came a time when he was reunited with his beloved son. And he gathered all the sons around his dying bed, and as part of his last message to them, said: "I have waited for God's salvation."

Jesus waited on the cross.

Even on the cross, Christ had to wait. We hear him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He had been forsaken, that we might never be. And yet, in one sense, it was not a real forsaking, because God was there. We long for easy things, and easy ways, but strength, growth, and knowledge never come easily. We must learn to endure. Seek not the crown before the cross. We are to drink the cup as well as eat the bread. There is tribulation as well as triumph. We are to bear the cross, looking unto Jesus; and God will deliver. The cross will become to us as sails to a ship, and as wings to a bird.

The delays of love—summary.

Life is essentially problematic. It is not easy for anybody. Life is a school. Its colors are black and blue, and the school cry is "ouch."

We should draw comfort in life's trials from the fact that Jesus loves us, not that we love him. His love is permanent and unchanging. That is not true of ours.

It often seems to us that God is doing nothing about our troubles. This is waiting time; our growing time. To see the love of God in the delays of God is a mark of Christian maturity.

Disappointment and heartbreak can often destroy health, but faith can preserve it. 

The Spirit Arrives (Continued from previous page) Pentecost and the last days.

Pentecost was the inauguration of God's final proclamation to the world. It was a "last-day" event because it was directly connected to the preaching of the gospel. The life-death-resurrection of our Lord is the core of the gospel message, and is an eschatological event (Hebrews 9:26+27).

Peter's conviction was that the messianic age had already dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that we are already living in the final days of God's saving history. Peter's conviction was very much in keeping with the Rabbinic consensus that the Spirit no longer rested on all Israel, but would return as a universal gift at the end of time (1).

Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy about what would occur in the last days. Joel's prophecy closes with the declaration that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Pentecost inaugurated God's last appeal to mankind. This appeal is to continue until the "glorious day of the Lord." The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all


nations until Christ comes (Matthew 24:14, 28:20).

Pentecost and church growth.

The seeds for the growth of the apostolic church were planted at Pentecost. New churches would be established because of this event. Many critics today doubt the literal truth of the Pentecostal events. However, these critics fail to account for the church's spread throughout the empire. God is the only adequate explanation for the growth of the church in the Mediterranean world.

Promises kept.

Pentecost tells Christians today that God keeps his promises. It reminds us that we have heaven's resources at our disposal. God has given us all we need to serve and to obey him. Pentecost gave birth to the church of which we are descendants. Let us take comfort that God will finish what he started so long ago.

(1) John B. Polhill . Acts. The New American Commentary p. 26. 

WHEN WEAKNESS IS STRENGTH

by Gwen M. Ford

We may hold various opinions on a wide variety of subjects and people, without very disastrous consequences. But there is one attitude that is vital: What do I really believe about God? Do I need him, or would life be much the same without him? The answer we give, or the reply that we give to these queries, will put us on either side of a line as impenetrable as the former Iron Curtain, and will vastly effect our present peace, and future destiny.

An ancient pair of twins, apparent scoundrels both, illustrate the importance of this matter. One of them has millions of descendants today, and his race has been the most influential the world has known. The other's line has been far less notable. This second man is typical of those who think that God is irrelevant.

Esau, son of Isaac, was willing enough to retain the birthright, with its religious implications, so long as it cost him nothing, while, in fact, he believed it to be of little real value. Were not his own hands sufficient to provide for his needs? Esau wished to be free, without the ties involved in religion.

In contrast, his twin brother Jacob prized the family birthright, and longed to possess it. His heart yearned for the privilege of being spiritual leader in the household. He knew that the world's redeemer would come through the line of him who possessed the birthright.

Of the two men, most of us would prefer Esau. He was every inch a man. While Jacob was more of a sissy, clinging to his mother's apron strings. He was hardly a noble type of character. On one occasion he lied to his aged father, and in the endeavor to secure the birthright by stealth, pretended to be Esau.

Who would have predicted such divergent destinies for these two brothers? What factor made it possible for Jacob and his seed to rise to worldwide prominence, while the line of the apparently more promising of the two, fades away into oblivion?

Let's look at what led to such divergent results. Esau, feeling sufficient to accomplish whatever he pleased, proceeded nonchalantly along his carefree, but eventually, tragic path. Jacob, after years of struggle, reached a crisis in his life. The event occurred following more than twenty years of separation from Esau, at a time when he was about to meet his aggrieved twin, and it looked as if it was "all over" for him and his family.

After he left his uncle Laban, on his journey back to the promised land, Jacob was told: "Thy brother Esau cometh to

meet thee, and four hundred with him." Jacob became very distressed. He made plans as best he could, and sought opportunity to find a 'divine' solution to his dilemma. "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until breaking of the day."


As dawn came, Jacob was aware that the 'man' with whom he wrestled, was a messenger from God. Feeling destitute, Jacob grasped after that which he thought was his only hope. "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," he said. Then the heavenly assailant asked, "What is thy name?" Now drained of all his strength, Jacob owned himself for what he really was, "Jacob." As if to say, "You know what I am: 'deceiver,' 'supplanter.' I am all these things."

Could any situation be more hopeless than Jacob's? His confession of unworthiness, and his admission of utter inability in this crisis, enlisted the divine aid. His dependence on God at this time was the factor that determined his destiny. To plummet as Jacob did, into an abyss of helplessness, need not spell finish for anyone. To make the admission that we cannot manage life without God, can be the turning point for human experience.

The twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, with their contrasting attitudes to God, are representative of two forces which continually battle for supremacy within Christians. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." It was many years after Jacob's night of crisis and decision that Jacob and Esau met once more, through their descendants. Israel was on the march to Canaan when they encountered the Amalekites—Esau's descendants. Scripture records the conflict that ensued:

Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses had said to him and fought with Amalek and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed. And when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed (Exodus 17:9-11).

Israel's victory over Amalek was God-given. It was not achieved; it was received. This secret is for us. Not self-effort, but a looking in faith to the faithful One is what is needed to win the battle. The New Testament echoes this thought when it says: "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

—Gwen M. Ford was the first wife of Dr. Desmond Ford, before her decease. 

THE BLESSING OF HAVING NOTHING

By Johan Schep

The Blessing of Having No Ministry.

"Yet when I preach the gospel I cannot boast. . . ." (1 Corinthians 9:16).

God does not need us in his work; but he wants us, and has chosen us in his purposes, so that the glory only goes to him. When the ministry is his, we need never worry about staying in the business, for we do not keep him in business, he keeps us in business. *"For we are God's workmanship. . . ." (Ephesians 2:10).*

The Blessing of Having No Possessions.

"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7).

When we have nothing, we have nothing to protect. No worry about our riches rotting or our gold rusting. God promises to give us all we need; not all that we want (Matthew 6:19-33).

The Blessing of Having No Power.

Jesus could do nothing apart from his Father's indwelling. We can do nothing apart from Christ. The blessedness of powerlessness is that we are in a proper position to draw on the unlimited resources of Christ. God's greatest saints are his best receivers.

The Blessing of Having No Ego.

"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3).

This blessing frees us from the unjust criticisms of others. Self-righteousness is a trap. We must be content with Jesus Christ; not with our progress in Christ.

The Blessing of Having No Righteousness of My Own.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

If there is anything spiritual about us, it has its origin in the Holy Spirit, and not in ourselves. The Word of God speaks of the *fruit of the Spirit*, not the *fruit of the saint*.

I have discovered that blessing in the Christian life, comes through brokenness (Psalm 51:7). Not in laughter and fullness, but in emptiness and tears, I have learned that the Lord Jesus is everything.

*Johan Schep is a Field Representative for Capernwray. He has spent many years of evangelism in Israel.

TO and FRO with the Editor

Question: *I am a fourth generation believer within my denomination. I have been led by the Spirit to study some distinctive beliefs of my church. I have now seen that these doctrines are false. If I present the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone, and they wish to be baptized, to which church can I point them? What do you suggest? I really do not have an acceptable alternative home church besides the SDA church in this country.*
P.V.

Answer: Yours is a familiar difficulty. But not, in my view, an insuperable one. There is much about your present perplexity that was experienced by those who were the first to believe in Jesus. The first Christian communities were Jewish. They did not view themselves as discontinuous with Judaism. In fact, they viewed Jesus, and their attachment to him, as the full flowering of the ancient faith. They worshiped in the temple precincts at first. As opposition grew, they were obliged to meet in homes, or in the open.

I suggest that, while you are able to meet with your parent community, contribute there, as well as receive, you should continue to fellowship. When it is no longer possible for you to receive and give blessing at your worship place, it is time for you to choose a place where you can exercise both of these functions.

You will discover, of course, that you will likely not find another communion that believes and thinks as you do in every particular. What we all need is a place of Christian nurture where the 'central truths' of Christ are those that are decisive for fellowship and service. I think it would be a mistake to forgo fellowship, altogether, merely on the grounds, say, that an alternative sabbatarian fellowship was not available. The plain evidence is that God gives his Spirit to a marvelous variety of peoples, who have different ideas, and different ways of responding to Christ.

If it becomes impossible for you to serve and be served in your present church, do not hesitate to join with another group that will accept you as a brother, no matter if your convictions differ from theirs in some areas. Remember you are not alone. God is with you. Others have trod the way you go, before. You may feel solitary. You are not. God has people everywhere, who are his very own. You will meet some of them. They will meet you—and be blessed in the encounter.

Question: *I have been perplexed in regard to the crowds of Christians that demonstrate great zeal toward the game of football, yet seem to have forgotten the biblical directive of Christ-centered fellowship, and ministry. I'm a man, yet I'm made to feel as if I were an alien from another planet because I'm not a sports fan. Before I became a Christian, I had many friends that enjoyed gambling in Nevada. I got so tired of going to Nevada with them because I would end up spending more time alone and bored due to the fact that I hated gambling. Now I find myself in a similar situation with my newfound brothers and sisters. There's nothing that can be done for me; I can't change. I can't stand football. I can't understand the*

appeal, especially with Christians. Is being a football fan some kind of directive from the Holy Spirit? I just don't get it. Should I go to another country if I really want Christian fellowship? I love my savior, and I refuse to abandon the faith, but I need fellowship, not sports.

P.M.

Answer: There's no good reason why you should become a sports fan, or a gambler, just to have fellowship. I am sure there are other Christians who are just as bored with these two pursuits as you are. You live in a land where sports is probably bigger than most other religions, so it is not surprising that many of your friends—even your Christian ones—have an interest in sports. If they are good friends, they will accept that you have other things that you appreciate. If there is no one in your church that can enjoy your interests, it might be worthwhile looking around for another group to fellowship with.

Stay true to yourself, and to your faith. God has made you who you are. God will give you friends with whom you can share your life, without having to go to football games.


Comment: *I am very interested in studying how once saved, a person is justified, and a contract is drawn up, and this is a legal contract stamped with the blood of Jesus. So once a person is saved, this contract is binding. Your comments please.*

B.V.

Reply: The relation between God and his people has a long history of being known as a relationship in covenant. In ancient Bible times, parties would make covenants by cutting an animal in two, and passing between the severed carcass (see Genesis 15). By means of this primitive bloodshedding, solemn agreements were made. When God made a covenant with Israel, it was not an agreement between equals like so many primitive covenants. It was a provision of sovereign grace, determined entirely by God, and sealed by the shedding and sprinkling of animal blood (Exodus 24). In this way the people knew that God had pledged himself to them in a very sure and certain way.

In the New Testament, the word 'testament,' itself, is covenant. The Old and New Testaments are the Old and New Covenants. According to Hebrews 9 the New Covenant is sealed by the blood of Jesus, which is superior to the blood of bulls and goats that was used to confirm the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.

In Hebrews 9:16 'covenant,' has the sense of a will. The author makes the point that a will only comes in force when the person who willed it dies. The New Covenant is like a will since it is brought into effect by Jesus' death.

Just as a will cannot be changed after the death of the one who made it, so the covenant sealed by Jesus' blood cannot be changed. This is the ground on which our assurance rests. It cannot be taken away from us. 

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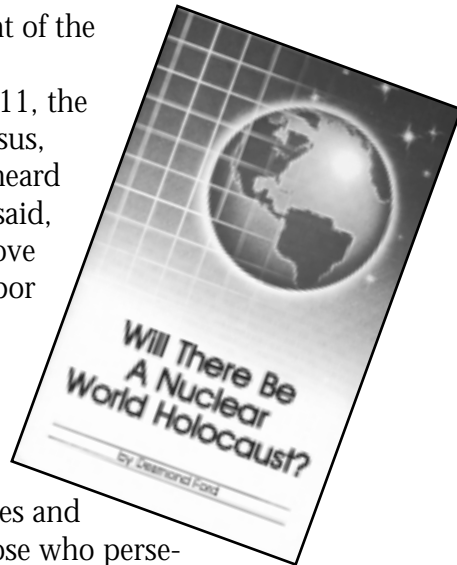
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WILL THERE BE A NUCLEAR WORLD HOLOCAUST?

a book by Dr. Desmond Ford

In the light of the events of September 11, the words of Jesus, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, . . ." (Matthew 5:43 & 44) have to be seen not as nice little aphorisms to be framed and hung on a wall, but as urgent "life or death" imperatives for us to be more like God, who make the sun to rise on the evil and the good (Matthew 5:45).



This little volume by Desmond Ford examines the nuclear peril in the light of the radical love of God expressed in Jesus. It is full of faith and hope. For example: "The problem is not the nuclear weapons. It is the nuclear man. No one would be worried about nuclear war if Mother Theresa was put in charge of the nuclear weapons. It's not the hardware, it's the heartware." "The bomb is limited in its range. The worst it can do can only last until the resurrection."

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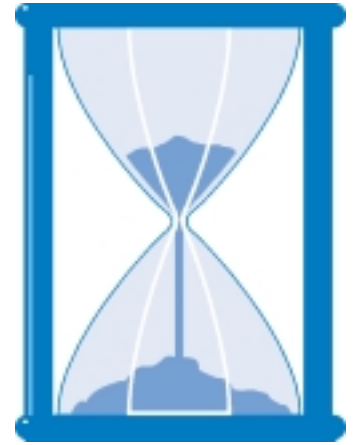
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CHANGING TIMES

At Good News Unlimited



Twenty Good Years.

Those who have been readers of this journal since its inception, will know that for twenty years, Dr. Desmond Ford was president of GNU, its chief evangelist, and regular contributor to these pages. For two decades Desmond Ford was used by God to the blessing of many. Thousands were taught the gospel, and just as many will testify that they found beauty, joy, and excitement in a religious experience they had never known before.

Though Dr. Ford is healthier than most, he is nevertheless mortal like the rest. In August 2000, he made a decision to quit his itinerant lifestyle, and retire to a restricted set of responsibilities in his native Australia. Though he still accepts some invitations to speak, he now lives life at a more measured pace.

Ron Allen at GNU.

To help fill the void at GNU, after Ford's departure, Ron Allen came from GNU Australia. Ron joined Pastor Roy Gee, who had been Des' helper for many years. Ron is now president of Good News Unlimited, and editor of GNU magazine.

New Situations and Surprise Events.

Any Christian ministry, headed by a charismatic leader, will experience some loss of momentum when that leader retires. This did happen to GNU. Des' retirement, combined with a new economic environment that came into vogue from late 2000, as well as the shock of September 11, 2001, placed GNU under significant financial strain. To meet this challenge, the GNU board of directors voted to trim pastoral staff from two, to just one. To facilitate this move, Pastor Roy Gee has retired, effective from December 31, 2001.

Auburn Gospel Fellowship.

Roy's preaching has been a blessing to many; not least to those who have regularly attended the fellowship at GNU, where Roy has Pastored for so long. In order to enable Roy to continue his ministry, the fellowship at GNU corporate headquarters has voted to become a corporate entity, distinct from GNU, self-funding, and self-administered. This means that the fellowship will assume entire responsibility for Roy's pastoral salary. The fellowship will now be

known as, Auburn Gospel Fellowship, and will continue to meet in the GNU building, as usual. Roy will be available to preach at GNU Bible schools, and GNU will record his messages which will continue to be part of the resources for GNU audio products.

These new structural arrangements have made it possible for GNU to affect necessary, and substantial savings, as well as enable Roy to continue his appreciated ministry.

GNU, the Future, and You.

We are aware that most of those who use GNU products, and who are GNU readers and supporters, are not affected by these new arrangements. Be assured, that all the good things you have come to appreciate from GNU will continue to flow to you. GNU magazine; Tape of the Month; thrice yearly Bible Schools at Auburn, as well as regional ones. Auburn Gospel Fellowship will meet in Alderson Hall at the usual time. Saturday 9:45 A.M. Bible Study. Worship hour 10:45 A.M. Visitors are always welcome.

GNU Web Page.

If you like to get your information on-line, be aware that the GNU website features each magazine in full. www.goodnewsunlimited.org The website is getting better. There is a daily devotional—new each day; A new letter from the pastor each month, and an 'ask the pastor' section, where you can dialogue with Pastor Allen.

Good News Unlimited Lives by Your Support.

Good News Unlimited needs you! If you have found help, good Bible teaching, joy, assurance, and inspiration for living from GNU gospel resources, we invite you to support us regularly with your means. Your ongoing participation in this ministry will bring life, hope, liberty, and Christian certainty to someone. May you be guided by the Spirit of Christ, when you consider your level of involvement in Good News Unlimited.

A Satisfied Reader

Dear folks at GNU,

We think the March GNU magazine is the best ever. "The Search for a Universal," required two or three readings, but that's not bad. When Des left, we were afraid that GNU would wither and die away, but now we are thinking differently. Thank you, Ron.

We wonder what the circulation of the magazine is? Also, if there is a way to increase it. Maybe a notice in the magazine suggesting a subscription to someone who an existing subscriber thinks will appreciate it. We really appreciate the Tape of the Month also.

R. L.

Dear R.L.

Thank you for expressing your satisfaction with GNU magazine. If there are other readers willing to take up your suggestion, we will be only too happy to send our magazine to names and addresses of folk that you know would appreciate it. Good News Unlimited magazine has a missionary purpose. Your friends will not be billed for it.

ED.



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THE TREASURE HOUSE OF GRACE

by Desmond Ford

*"Through whom we have gained access by faith, into this grace in which we now stand."
(Romans 5:2).*

Amazing Access.

"Gained access." It is as though we have come into a great treasure room. "In which we now stand." You don't sit down; you stand there. You stand because from now on, it's going to be a walk with God. A walk is a continually interrupted falling. You are living by faith. You can't breathe once, and that's it forever. Every small boy is glad you don't have just one birthday party, where you eat—and that's it forever. You get to do it repeatedly. You have to trust repeatedly. One step after another, every step, a step of faith.

We walk; we stand, because we have already gained access to God's grace in Christ. We are in a great treasure room. Clive, the eighteenth-century British general, was taken into the Indian Rajah's treasure room. The Rajah said to Clive, "You see all these rubies, diamonds, and sapphires? Help yourself." Clive didn't want to seem ungrateful, so he took a few. When he got back to England, he was summoned before a law court. "You stole some of the property of His Majesty King George III, when you were in India on government service."

Clive explained the situation, and told how he was invited to take what he wanted. "I'm amazed at my own moderation," he exclaimed.

Amazing Moderation.

The angels are amazed at our moderation. We all have 100 percent of the merits of Christ put to our account. That's our access to God. But with the access, comes accessories. The rule of the treasure house of grace is, "According to your faith will it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29 NIV). With our access to God comes accessories, such as joy and fruitfulness.

We should be amazed at our own moderation. We could all do so much more than we are doing. God accepts us in Christ, as though we are doing it all. But here we are in this treasure house, and God would have us remember his rule: "According to your faith will it be done to you."

From D. Ford. "RIGHT WITH GOD RIGHT NOW" (pp. 71+72).

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