


GOOD NEWS

Unlimited



September 2004

God's Inheritance - and Ours

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EDITORIAL . . .

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God...”
(Ephesians 6:10).

These words come at the end of a letter in which Paul has defined salvation as the outcome of God's sovereign grace. The first chapters are brimful with that thrilling theme. Yet, in the last half of Ephesians, salvation is discussed as a matter of human exertion.

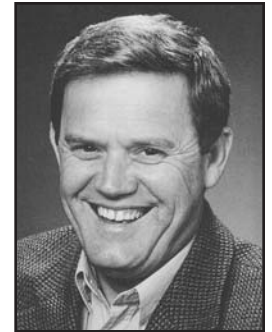
For some, the close association of these two ideas seems incongruous and inadmissible. The one seems to cancel the other (Ephesians 2:8+9). Yet Paul is not embarrassed to place the work of Christ and an energetic human rejoinder, side by side (not just in Ephesians, but in most of his letters).

The apostle knew that God had brought about the salvation of his people through Christ. *“In him we have redemption through his blood; the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace”* (1:7). That victory however, was not won without a struggle, and those who benefit from it will not be able to have it untested and unchallenged. There is evil in the world. Hostile powers seek to undo faith at every step. It is therefore fitting that Christians do whatever possible to ward off enemy action.

The journey of faith is pictured in military terms. Christians are called to put on the *full armor*. Later in the passage, Paul lists seven pieces of a soldier's fighting armor, all of which are made to symbolize aspects of Christ. It is a call to take advantage of all that Christ is for his church. *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”* (Ephesians 6:10).


Paul has already spoken about the Lord and his mighty power in earlier chapters. For example: *“But because of*

his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6). And *“. . . his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms”* (2:19+20).



Ron Allen

The power deployed in Christ's death and resurrection was God's power. It was, and is, incomparable and unassailable. Men and women of faith are asked to nerve themselves for inevitable trial by arming their spirits with the greatness and competency of Jesus. Put on the *full armor!* In other words, know how much Christ has done; how he has already made heaven certain; that paradise is yours; there is no condemnation; you are accepted in the beloved; death cannot harm you.

Whatever effort may be necessary in donning the full battle dress of Christ, it should not be mistaken for the anxious striving of those who think to win heaven by their own diligence. It is rather the strenuous activity of free men and women. God does not demean the gift of eternal life by making it worth so little that we are not even asked to weigh its value by risking ourselves for it. Be strong in the Lord. Share the thrill of a cause and a prize more excellent than all else beside. 

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GOD'S INHERITANCE— AND OURS

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by Ron Allen

One Deadly Night

On the night of March 26, 1848, a man named Robert Cox was murdered. His dismembered body looked as if it had been cut up by a butcher; its several parts were discovered; hideously displayed at some distance from each other.

Police established that Robert Cox had come to town not long before his death, and during one of his long drinking sessions in a nearby tavern, he had made it known that he was carrying on his person a sum of approximately \$600—a lot of money in those days. It would have taken a man several years to amass that kind of money. In any case, the money was missing from Cox's remains, and it was never recovered.

Several men were known to have been drinking with Cox on the night of his murder. Among them were William Fyfe, and Patrick Mayne. Things looked very bad for Fyfe. Drops of blood were found on the floor of his room as well as on his clothes, and he was at a loss to explain. Within months, William Fyfe, despite his protestations of innocence, was hanged for the murder of Robert Cox.

Eyebrows Are Raised

Little was heard of Patrick Mayne afterwards. He dropped completely out of sight, but nine months after the murder, he re-appeared to buy a butcher's store in the town. To make the purchase he paid cash; pulling from his coat pocket a wad of notes that would have taken any man several years to earn. It raised more than a few eyebrows!

Prosperous Years

Patrick Mayne's butchery was a success from the beginning. As he prospered he bought grazing lands on the city's outskirts to fatten his stock on. Each year he bought commercial property in town, and before long rental money made him a wealthy man indeed. He married a girl from his native Ireland and soon he was the father of a fine family.

Though Patrick was disliked by many he continued to do well. He had a reputation for ruthless dealings. He carried a riding whip with him and would use it to flog anyone who crossed him. Despite this blemish in his character he was respected as a hard-headed business man, and for a time, served on the city council.

A Bitter Legacy

In 1865, Patrick Mayne was very ill. Two days before his death he summoned the parish Priest to his home and confessed to him that it was he that had murdered Robert Cox. He had taken Cox's blood and sprinkled it in Fyfe's room, and on his

clothes while the unfortunate man was in a drunken slumber.

By the time Patrick Mayne was dead and buried, the news of his confession had leaked out. It spread like wildfire across the city neighborhoods. There were many who remembered the grisly murder. Patrick's wife and children were devastated. Condemnation and loathing that Patrick Mayne had earned for himself was now heaped upon his hapless family. He had not only robbed and murdered Cox. He had contrived to have his innocent friend, William Fyfe hang for it. Now his loved ones must endure the public's disgust on his behalf.

At the time of his death, Mayne was exceedingly wealthy. His wife Mary and her children had no want of money, but they were shunned by the community. No matter that Mary and her children proved to be good citizens in their own right, and that they sought every opportunity to serve in philanthropic ways, they were avoided and isolated.

After their mother had passed away, the surviving children lived in a mansion on the edge of town, surrounded by a high wall. People kept away from it, and many a legend sprung up and found repetition, about the untold evils that lurked there.

The Mayne family suffered and were dogged to the end of their days by the bitter legacy left them by their father. Well might he have kept his mouth shut, and taken his horrible secret with him to the grave. But this he chose not, and as a result, conferred on his family a mean and cursed inheritance.



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2 GOD'S INHERITANCE— AND OURS

by Ron Allen



A Better Inheritance

Most people think of an inheritance as a very good thing. They imagine their parents, or some other relative, bequeathing to them a handsome estate which might mean the end of their worries about having to work so hard. Certainly, the curse that the Mayne inheritance proved to be, is not what is countenanced. In Ephesians 1:14, the generous boon that God has for his children is bestowed in Christ, and it is called *our inheritance*. And what a rich and glorious inheritance it is. It does include some of what we think is an inheritance—and much more.

Back of Paul's language about "*inheritance*," is the story of God's gracious dealings with Israel. "I brought you out of Ur to give you this land to take possession of it" (Genesis 15:7), said God to Abram. Then after many generations had come and gone, Abraham's descendants came to Canaan and took possession of it. The land was divided among the twelve tribes, and each clan received an allotment; a portion; an inheritance. Each family's inheritance was a gift from God; a gift of divine grace—and it was permanent.

God knew that his people would be tempted to shrewd and grasping habits. Others could be foolish and indolent; some acquisitive and wasteful. Laws were given which provided that if a man sold his land to pay a debt, the nearest male relative of that man could redeem his land and return it to him. Even if a man's possession was not redeemed in this way, it had to be returned to him, or to his descendant in the fiftieth year—the year of jubilee. "No man's inheritance may pass from tribe to tribe; each tribe is to keep the land it inherits" (Numbers 36:7-9). God's gift was not to become working capital by which one could profit at another's expense. Each inheritance was sacrosanct. It had to be recognized and remembered as God's gift which could not be taken away.

The Old Testament background of 'inheritance' is present in Ephesians, but now the boundless generosity of God has burst into prominence in Christ. The Christian inheritance consists in "*the riches of God's grace which he lavished on us*" (Ephesians 1:7+8).

Everything that God has for us is vested in Jesus. He is the Isarel of God. He is the head of the clan—head of the church (1:22+23). In Christ the ancient promise is fulfilled. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Christians are "*sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 3:6). Like Israel's inheritance in Canaan, their's is non-negotiable. Furthermore, it has a permanence beside which Israel's was only a shadow. The Christian inheritance is everlasting. "*Christ is the mediator of the promised eternal inheritance*" (Hebrews 9:15).

Heirs of God

According to Ephesians 1:3, God has given us "*every spiritual blessing in Christ*." Out of the measureless resources of his own person, God has poured himself into Christ, and included us in him. "*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:17). The Christian inheritance is God himself—known and experienced through faith in Christ. "*God is my portion*" (Psalm 73:26). "*The Lord is my portion; I will wait for him*" (Lamentations 3:24).

It is spirit that makes life rewarding. The Mayne family made the bitter discovery that with plenty of money but no fellowship, people are poor. There may be a surplus of things and stuff, but if you have no *one*—if mind does not connect with mind; if *heart* does not reach out to *heart*; if *spirit* does not resonate with *Spirit*, life is hollow.

The prodigal demands, "Give me my portion (inheritance)." The father gives the son what he wants. Later, the inheritance has been frittered away, and then, he thinks of home and of his father. He realizes after so much loss, that he left behind his true inheritance when he left his father!

It is God that satisfies. Men and women are unrequitable and inconsolable. Humans are finely crafted spiritual instruments requiring the infinite Spirit to play upon them, so their life is a song and not a dirge. God is the inheritance of his people. He has made himself accessible to us in Christ. We can 'possess' him through faith in Christ; through prayer, fellowship and service. God is the inheritance of his people.

When heaven on earth has begun, what will make it heaven and not something else? The Bible says that there will be no night there. Will that make it paradise? We are told there will be no thieves, murderers or liars, and no tears. Will that make it heaven? All of this could be granted and more besides, but if we had not God to be *ours*, it would not be bliss.

"*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. . . . God will be with them and be their God*" (Revelation 21:3).

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GOD'S INHERITANCE— 3 AND OURS

by Ron Allen

God's People—His Treasured Possession

"In him we were also chosen..." (Ephesians 1:11).

The word 'chosen,' is the verb form of a Greek Old Testament word, which was used for allotment, or portion of the land given to the tribes for their inheritance. For this reason the best translations render Ephesians 1:11: *"In Christ, we became an inheritance. . ."* That this gives the proper sense is affirmed by the last part of verse 14, where God's people are called his *possession* (possession is another term meaning inheritance).

In Jesus Christ, God's people became his inheritance. This idea is also present in the Old Testament. *"For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:9).* See also, Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 42:21.

Because of God's action in Christ, God has become our heritage, while we have become his. This appears as a thrilling reciprocity. But we should carefully note that we are not God's equal in this transaction. The truth can be stated thus: in the one act, God has given himself to us, and given us to himself. God is sovereign in the whole procedure, though he makes possible a mutually rewarding relationship. *"My beloved is mine, and I am his..." (Song of Songs 2:16).*

In Christ, God is the infinite inheritance of his people, and although the correspondence is far from precise, God has made his people his possession. He obtains joy from them.

He treasures his heritage. *"I will rejoice over Jerusalem, and take delight in my people" (Isaiah 65:19).*

Kept Safe in the Love of God

That his people are God's inheritance means that they can never be lost to him. God is not so foolish as to squander his treasure, or waste the 'apple of his eye.' Prodigal behavior of that sort belongs to us, by which it can be seen that God has risked much by making himself his people's heritage. By placing the riches of his grace in idle, dumb and imprudent human hands, he has put himself in the way of disappointment and heartbreak. Yet, had not God acted thus, we would have been left undone; we would have languished in the far country, away from our father's house.

That God is the inheritance of his people, is the feebler side of his relationship to them. That he has made them **his** inheritance, is the stronger side. I cannot trust myself enough to say that I will never, ever let go of God, but he has made me his portion, and he will never let go of me.

*O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul on thee.
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in its ocean depths its flow;
May richer, fuller be.
-George Matheson.*

In Heavenly Places

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If Children—Then Heirs!

by James Stewart

Like a Son to His Father


What happens in 'justification', Paul sometimes describes as "adoption." The justified man is now aware that his relationship to God is like that of a son to a father. No longer is he an outcast or a hired servant. His place is in the family. "You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship" (Romans 8:15). Behind such statements lies Paul's own radical change of attitude, when he passed out of bitterness and slavish fear into peace and liberty.

A Glorious Freedom

The keynote of the life of adoption is freedom. On the other side of the line lies bondage, the unconfessed, but sore and melancholy servitude of the man who has no strong, controlling purpose; whose path is lit by no guiding light more reliable than his own reason and desires; whose inner life is one of inglorious moral defeat. But adoption carries with it the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). Personality, once disintegrated, is now unified; repression

gives way to release; the tone of the moral life becomes victorious. It is life "in the Spirit." "Those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). And it is a life of wonderful assurance. It does not spend its days anxiously debating the question, "Am I saved or am I not?" Its cry is—"Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

God's Faithful Word

This confidence, of course, is based on nothing in the man himself. It has its source in God, and in the pledge of God who never goes back upon his call (see Romans 11:29). If God has accepted a man into his family, who is there to shut him out? Come the whole world against him, the man who knows his sonship of God can remain untroubled and unshaken. One word of the living God means more than a thousand loud hectoring voices of this earth. "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24). That is the adopted soul's high confidence; and it stands against the world. 

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GNU thanks you for your prayers and your sacrifice.

Owning God's Gifts – Without Being Owned by Them

from a Sermon by G. N. Mendenhall

*“. . . You shall rejoice in all the good things
the Lord your God has given you”
(Deuteronomy 26:11).*

How hard it is to stand prosperity. As long as we are in need of the good things in life we are kept humble, and we feel our dependence upon the Lord. But when we get a competence, and we feel that we have enough ahead to last many days, we grow careless and begin to compliment ourselves, and have confidential talks with our souls—and forget God.


There is another extreme that used to be practiced a great deal, and that was despising the good things of life. It was considered a mark of piety to deny oneself the pleasures of life; to live on the plainest of foods, and dress in the coarsest clothing. The old monks used to wear the roughest clothing next to the skin; sleep on sticks and stones, thinking that this was a service well-pleasing to God.

I read a book in which a young couple from New York City inherited an estate in the mountains on the condition that they live on it and keep up the business. It was a typical back-woods place, and these people who had been accustomed to the good things of the city, began to introduce some of the things among those people. One day the lady gave a party and asked all the ladies to come and spend the afternoon with her. They came, and during the afternoon,

ice-cream was served. It was the first time many of them had ever tasted it. One lady said that the cream was very good, that it must be awfully sinful to enjoy anything so good!

God has give us so much to enjoy here, and nothing is too good for his children. This is but a preparatory chamber for the home beautiful which the Lord has prepared for us. If we are to prepare for that home while we are here, it seems fitting and proper that we should enjoy some of the good things of this life.

I have known some people that seemed to live on trouble. They seemed to think that a long face was a mark of piety and the “open sesame” to the land of bliss. There are woes enough in the world when we strive to be happy and contented. Enough troubles will overtake you to cause you to spend many unhappy moments without your chasing after them. There are a great many people borrowing trouble. I would like to loan all I have, and then move away so the borrowers would not know where to return the borrowed goods. It is not good management to borrow what we do not need.

The rich fool had much of the good things of life and was preparing to enjoy them. Dives lived sumptuously every day. We would say he rejoiced in all the good things given to him, but both of these men made a fatal mistake. The good things in life are not to be made the greatest things of life. We are to enjoy them but not live for them only. “*A mans life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15). 

Got a Question? Ask the Pastor!

You can ask questions and get answers at the
GNU Website

www.goodnewsunlimited.org

Just click ‘**Ask the Pastor**’ and then write your question. Neither the question, nor Ron Allen’s answer to it, will be public unless you grant ‘permission to post.’ Either way, you will receive an e-mailed reply.

Ron has 30 years experience as a Christian preacher. He answers with candor, compassion and understanding. ‘**Ask the Pastor**’ is a popular feature of Good News Unlimited ministry on the World-Wide-Web.

FORMAT UPDATE FOR TAPE OF THE MONTH

GNU Tape of the Month will soon be available in CD format.

Many newer sound recording and playing devices use Compact Discs instead of the long-serving audio cassette tapes. Most new motor vehicles no longer come equipped with a cassette tape player.

To meet this new reality GNU will begin using both formats. What has till now been called **Tape of the Month** will be re-named **Message of the Month**. Those who wish to receive this service on CD, and those who want the taped version, will need to indicate their preference by contacting Good News Unlimited.

Wealth, Poverty, and the Christian Inheritance

by Louis Evely

The Poor are Open to God

"Blessed are the poor." Blessed are those who hear the word of God, who need something, who are waiting, who are suffering, who are open, who hunger. Happy are the poor, for the kingdom of God is for them. Only the poor man has access to God, because only the poor man goes out of himself, and opens himself to God. He is happy who knows that he is poor, for he knows that he is incapable of being happy all by himself.

The Front Door

Poverty is not the crown piece of the Christian life, it is the front door. It is the decisive distinction, from the very beginning, between those who can be Christian and those who cannot. If you are rich, there is nothing to be done with you. Christ could not do anything with the rich, above all, with the rich in religion. The Pharisees were rich, if not with money, at least in their self-sufficiency. They were satisfied with themselves, sure of their knowledge, content in their practices. They knew much better than the Lord what he had to teach them, and they intervened constantly to criticize him. The poor man is he who accepts being called into question by the word of God, who allows himself to be unsettled by God's word, who knows that it is not he who possesses his faith, but that it is the faith that has possessed him.

To what extent then, is our faith the true faith? Let us allow ourselves to be criticized by the word of God. Let us allow ourselves to be stripped bare by it. Do you recall that this is its function: to make us poor? *"You are already pruned by the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3).

Not About Money, but About Heart

How to be poor is a question which badgers you because at the threshold of genuine religious life you feel that it is this problem in particular that you must solve. What differentiates us from pagans is not necessarily generosity. St. Paul says, *"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing."* It is possible to be generous without having true charity.

It is poverty which decides: we should not say of a generous, straightforward pagan, that he is a Christian without knowing it. We should wonder if he practices these virtues in poverty, or in superiority, autonomy, self-sufficiency. This is the

question: is he a poor man who receives, or a rich man who has nothing to give?

Poverty is not a question of money, but of heart. The fact of not having money is not a virtue. One can be penniless and have the soul of a rich man. One can also (but it is rare) be a man of property, and have the soul of a poor man. Poverty is a frame of mind and we are all invited to it. It is a certain experience of human limits which makes us open ourselves to God, and lose our ambition to be self-sufficient. It turns us towards him in expectation and trust.

Being Poor and In Trouble Does Not Always Make Us Better

Poverty and suffering do not always make us better, they do not always bring us closer to virtue, but they always bring us closer to truth. They tell us about ourselves. Man is poor at the bottom of himself, and if he ceased being poor economically, he would still be terribly poor morally. Material poverty is only a sign, a warning, a symbol of our real poverty.

Each of us should think of how he has experienced the poverty of the world, the limitation of man, the indigence and profound weakness of

the human soul. The burden we bear reveals to each of us what others bear. Our misery is fraternal because it tells us about those around us. It is naive to think that there are people outside of this fraternity, people without need of anyone else. At some level of human experience each man knows that he is poor. At some level of human experience we are all totally insufficient before God.

What God asks from you is to love one another. Do not rack your brain for ways of depriving yourself, do not embitter yourself by gratuitous mortifications. Love others and you will soon be poor.

The Happiness of Depending on God

Happy is the poor man, for he is dispensed from being rich. He lives in joint possession with providence. He accepts a certain necessary insecurity, because he has a father in heaven, and brothers on earth. Happy is the poor man, for he is filial, free, fraternal. He has entered the kingdom of God. He has begun to enjoy a life and a happiness which belongs to him forever.

Louis Evely. *A Religion For Our Time*, pp. 9-27. 

King and Kingdom— *The Christ of Matthew's Gospel* 2004 Fall Bible Seminar

The books of the Old Testament canon closed with the words of Malachi: “*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.*” Matthew begins his account by saying that this Lord has come in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of David and the son of Abraham. As the son of David, Jesus was the royal heir—the Messiah. As the son of Abraham, he was related to the father of the Jewish fellowship, but also to universal mankind— “*and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (Genesis 12:3).

Scholarship has recognized a dual emphasis in Matthew's presentation of Jesus. He is at pains to demonstrate to Jews that Jesus is the fulfiller of their national hopes. As believers, Christians are seen as the ideal Israel. But for all that, it is a New Israel unrestricted by the nationalistic environment out of which it emerged. In Matthew's story, Gentiles pay homage to Jesus at his birth; Egypt offers him asylum and protection; in the parable of the vineyard, Jesus says that “*another nation*” will take the place of the original tenant, and at the end, Jesus commissions his disciples to take the gospel to “*all the world.*”

In Matthew, Jesus belongs to the Jews—and to the world. It was Israel's hope that its days of hard service among the nations; the sufferings of war and famine, would yield to the reign of One whose wisdom was faultless; whose love was perfect; whose power was supreme. Christ is that ruler! Armed with that conviction, Matthew bears witness to the royal features of Jesus—King of righteous; King of peace.

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THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

by Rodney Nelson

Shock and Awe

Do you remember what you were doing when you first heard about, or watched video recordings of the planes crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center? What indelible memory is placed in your mind from 9/11? Are “Shock and Awe” apt descriptions of that day? Watching the planes go into the huge towers was one thing, but the most unthinkable sight of the towers crashing to the ground was quite another. What a display of power!

In response to the 9/11 tragedy, President Bush committed US forces to searching and destroying the instigators of this crime against humanity. American military power was unleashed against cave dwellers in Afghanistan, and more recently against the regime of Saddam Hussein. Recall television images of cruise missiles and smart bombs destroying specific objectives in Baghdad. This overwhelming display of targeted force was termed, “Shock and Awe” (a phrase coined from a book by two military strategists). Reporters stationed in close proximity to the strikes were indeed shocked and awed by the tremendous display of military firepower. The scale and force of the attacks was unbelievable.

The Problem with Power

The problem with power is that people have a short memory of its impression and effect. In April 2003, I traveled with a student group to “Ground Zero,” where the Twin Towers once stood. There is now a big hole in the ground; nothing reminiscent of the pile of glass, steel and concrete left after they fell. I was impressed with the size of the hole, but I must admit I did not get a true impression of the scale of destruction that had been there. It is more a place of solemn memories of those who lost their loves. Those who witnessed the destruction probably have a different story than mine, but time has a way of dulling senses and memory.

Remember the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt when they were visited by the display of God’s power on several occasions during their journey. Who could forget the plagues on Egypt, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, and the parting of the sea. How could they forget such displays of power? But forget they did—and grumbled and

committed idolatry (Exodus 16:3; 17:2,3; 32:1,9). Memory faded when pressed by urgent desire and dissatisfaction. The past is too soon forgotten and too little remembered. Much is due to the human propensity to dwell in the present, forget the past and worry about the future. And mankind has not changed!

As the collective memory of Israel faded, so Christians often forget, or neglect to recall the power of God demonstrated in their own lives, or in the lives of others. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the lessons to be learned from Israel. *“These things happened to them as examples, and were written down as warnings for us... So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:11,12). It is no less true for the church today.

The gospel is not power from God, but the power of God, for salvation. Only the power of God could accomplish salvation for mankind. It is an act of God’s power.

Power Personified

The word for power is *dunamis* (power, might, ability, force). It is the source of our word dynamite. In varying contexts, it is used over 120 times in the New Testament. It may refer to the power of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:4), the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13), and the power of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Through the resurrection, God’s power demonstrated the lordship of Jesus (Romans 1:4 cf. Acts 10:38). Jesus’ miracles are demonstrations of God’s power (Matthew 11:20f; 13:58; Luke 19:37).

In the ancient Greek world, *dunamis* meant either a self-created and self-generated energy that governed the universe (sound like New Age thought?), or the transcendent essence of

existence (Plato). Both ideas pictured it as an impersonal force pervading the universe (Star Wars). Hebrew thought took *dunamis* and personalized it. The New Testament took *dunamis* and personified it in Christ (Romans 9:17; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 2 Corinthians 4:5-7; Hebrews 1:3). Christ is the power of God.

Power for Salvation

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is not power from God, but the power of God, for salvation. Only the power of God could →

A Minute with Clem


*“Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door”
(John 18:16).*

Have you ever known someone who was “in the know”—someone who had contacts, and who could arrange to have doors opened? It is very handy to know such a person, and it can be very frustrating being someone who does not have such a network of contacts. Knowing the right people with influence can save a lot of time and speed up the task at hand.

Peter was an ardent follower of Jesus, as he had demonstrated, risking the wrath of the authorities by drawing his sword in Gethsemane. However, when it came to entering

the precincts of the priesthood, Peter did not have the right contacts to gain entry to the courtyard. It must have been very frustrating for Peter to have to wait, while the other disciple went in and sought to secure his entrance—perhaps Peter was even a little resentful that this should be the case.

How often do we find ourselves frustrated by that very fact—to the point where it can affect our health and well-being? It is difficult for human nature and ego to accept such a situation. There is a sense, however, in which it might be best to wait outside. Perhaps life has not yet prepared us for what lies on the other side of the door. Afterwards, Peter may well have thought that the experience of denying his Lord was too high a price to pay for entry into the courtyard.

We can fulfill God’s role for our lives *wherever* we may find ourselves. It is not given to all of us to be an apostle, or an evangelist. God, in his wisdom, gives us unfettered access to himself and his love. We must trust in his leading with all of our weight, and believe that he will place us where we need to be (within or without the courtyard). This is not to walk away from responsibility, but to say, “Thy will be done.” 

-Clem Moss.

Continued from previous page
accomplish salvation for mankind. It is an act of God’s power. As such, no human can lay claim on God’s elective sovereignty. As the author and finisher of our faith, God alone has the prerogative of effecting salvation. Sin was a human dilemma; salvation was a divine solution.

Power of the Cross

In the New Testament, God’s power is centered in the cross (1 Corinthians 1:17,18). To the believer the cross is the power of God; to the unbeliever it is foolishness. In the first century the cross was the greatest demonstration of condemnation and weakness. Yet Paul declares it to be the demonstration of God’s power. In other words, it is power demonstrated through weakness. Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 1:23,24). Yet in the moment of greatest weakness, God’s strength was revealed (2 Corinthians 13:4).


Believing is Receiving

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to “everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16; Ephesians 1:9; John 3:15, 16). Belief centers on the promise of God. The power of God imputes righteousness to the believer by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, and imparts righteousness for the living of a holy life (Romans 1:17; 3:21-24). God’s power has given us “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). God has

given us “a Spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). We can do nothing without God’s grace, and his grace is connected to his power.

Spectacular Results

In basketball, the superstar player with spectacular physical abilities gets all the attention. However, for every Michael Jordan there are many more players who dutifully report for every game, enabling Jordan to receive notoriety. Similarly, there are ‘superstar’ Christians who do great things, even by worldly standards. Yet every Christian is able to do spectacular things for God. God views as spectacular, believers who selflessly and humbly serve their neighbor without seeking notoriety. They understand the lesson of the power of the cross: that it is through weakness that great things are accomplished. Paul summarizes it by saying, “Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8+9). On the cross, Christ exhibited God’s power through suffering so that by God’s power we might suffer for the gospel, and live a holy life.

When you are at your lowest is when God is closest. We serve a God who meets us at our point of need with his power. The gospel reveals a God who suffers in order to triumph. The greatest display of God’s power is in the life of one who has believed in Jesus Christ and his triumphant weakness. Take heart, rejoice and praise God for the power of the gospel that declares us righteous and makes us holy. 

THE BIBLE: A Natural or a Supernatural Book? Argument #2 God's Person, Jesus Christ

by Desmond Ford

Christ's Amazing Life

The most natural explanation for Christ is the supernatural. A simple but effective way of testing the claims of Christ is to consider his predictions about the future. Think first of his predictions about his own influence in the world as its spiritual son (John 8:12).

Christ placed a high estimate on men as the sons of God, and since the preaching of his gospel, efforts to protect and preserve life and to increase happiness have swelled to an unceasing stream of benevolence. For example, in the degenerate society of Christ's time, infanticide was a common practice of parents unwilling to support children. They murdered their sons and daughters without compunction. This is now a rarity. There were approximately sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire, the property of a privileged few. Today, slavery of that type is almost unknown. Organizations such as those fostered by Florence Nightingale, George Muller, Dr. T.J. Barnardo and others, had their mainspring in that love of humanity that succeeds a love of Christ.

Christ's Amazing Predictions

About three days before his death as a malefactor, the disciples heard Jesus say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). One modern translation says, "The sky and the earth won't last forever, but my words will" (CEV).

Jesus compares his speech with this great terrestrial globe on which we live. He implies that some passing syllables emitted into the air will have more perpetuity than the solid earth and the stars above. Do you see the depth and height of his words? Jesus reverses common sense. Obviously speech is temporary, otherwise we would never recover from some of our disagreements. If we trust anything we trust that the earth will be here tomorrow to stand on. But Jesus says the earth is temporary, but my speech is permanent.

Truth is a testing thing, and to open your mouth is a dangerous venture. But here is a man who says, "Listen, the opposite of what you think, is true. You think these syllables I speak will be carried away forever by the wind, and that this world will remain forever. However, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not." What an amazing claim! Each passing year lends its witness to the fulfillment of this amazing prediction.

Christ's Realism About the Future

Inscribed on the stones of edifices, printed in millions of books, indelibly written on the hearts of men, are the imperishable words of Jesus. Only one who was divine could speak as Christ spoke; only one who was divine could foretell the unfading

influence of his words. "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This explains the previous statement. His words were to be preserved and his gospel preached by an institution that would last as long as the world. Men and women of every generation would follow him, though opposition and fierce persecution (the gates of hell) would continually threaten to extirpate them.

Jesus further predicted the persecution of Christians with these words: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "The time cometh, when whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service" (Matthew 24:9; John 15:20; 16:2).

The Jews were the first to persecute the Christians, whom they regarded as renegades. Next, the Roman Emperors sought to crush out the unorthodox sect, and Christians, captured and coated with tar, became beacons to light the streets of Rome. Later came the papal persecutions of the Middle Ages, by sword and faggot. During the period of papal supremacy the blood of 50 million martyrs flowed.

The dimensions to which his church would grow were no mystery to Jesus. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed... which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matthew 13:31,32). From the day of Pentecost when three thousand accepted the gospel, the church grew miraculously despite persecution.

Christ's Realism About the Church—Bad and Good

Christ also knew that many would enter his church without a genuine change of heart, and that the greatest peril for the church would not be from without, but from within. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat..."(Matthew 13:24-26). When people condemn church-going hypocrites they overlook the words of the founder himself.

Just prior to his crucifixion Jesus calmly promised his disciples that the day would come when his teachings would be published wherever there were communities of men and women. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). This prediction is now being fulfilled. The nineteenth century was a century of missions. Prior to World Wars I and II, men on fire for Christ penetrated into Africa, Burma, India, China and the island groups of the South Seas. All nations are hearing the gospel preached to them in their own tongues; either through the living preacher or through media communications.

One striking aspect of this prophecy is found by studying its context. This universal preaching was to occur suddenly; to take place in the last generation. Only the sixteenth-century invention of printing, and the twentieth-century inventions of radio and television, and modern means of transportation could fulfill this specification of truth in a generation. →

NEWS BITS . . .

Election Year Religion

- Activity along the American church-state border seems to be stronger than usual this year, according to David Waters of Scripps Howard News Service. Here are some signs.
- Presidential candidates are talking—about their faith.
- Religious leaders, advocates, and scholars are calling on progressives to embrace their own faiths in order to strengthen public policy debates, and build a movement to win the ideological ‘war of ideas.’
- A resolution calling on Christians to abandon public schools has been aired, and rejected; much to applause from civil libertarians.
- A House committee has been considering the High Risk Non-profit Security Enhancement Act, which would allocate \$100 million for security renovations at houses of worship, and other charities.
- In Redlands California, officials have agreed to the ACLU’s request to remove a cross from that city’s seal. The new seal will feature a tree.

To Hell and Back

A Finnish study about commitment to Christian faith among church employees in the country has triggered strong national debate and some divided opinions. The discussion focussed largely on whether employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, or parishioners, should believe in the doctrine of hell or not. -ENI.

Big Hurdle

BOSTON. A scientific survey conducted by Harris Interactive ©, from May 25-27 2004, determined that the majority of adult Americans (69%) believe that religious differences are the biggest hurdle to achieving global peace. -RNS.

Distortion

A popular reading of Scripture, embraced by evangelical giants Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, and played out in the top-selling “Left Behind books, was declared a “distortion of the Biblical message” by leaders of the Reformed Church in America.

EU Constitution

GENEVA. European church leaders have welcomed the adoption of a European Constitution, but have noted they would have been happier if the document had an explicit

History Validates Christ’s Words

In our own day we find existing conditions outlined by the prophet of Nazareth. Speaking at a time when one empire ruled the world, and the great *Pax Romana* held sway, Jesus described the days before his return “*ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*” “*Earthquakes in divers places.*” “*Distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear*” (Matthew 24:6,7; Luke 21: 25,26). These words need no other commentary than our daily newspaper.

reference to the Christian roots of Europe in its preamble. -ENI.

Love INC.

Charles Sharrow searches across denominations and places of worship that want to be part of Love in the Name of Christ, or Love INC .

“The whole concept of this is to get away from church denominational labels. What we are trying to do as an organization is say, we are just trying to love people in the name of our Lord Jesus,” says Sharrow.

“We want to get people out of the pews and into the communities” to do Christ’s work. “We want to give people the opportunity to serve and feel good about themselves. When they serve, they feel better.” -Big News Network.ey

Pub Outreach

An Irish family has found an unlikely pulpit in a Minneapolis pub as worship leaders. Natives of Belfast, Northern Ireland, Paul Kyle and his wife, Hilary, along with their seven children, are spreading the gospel worldwide through song.

Soon after settling in the United States from Belfast in 1994, the Kyles were asked to set up “something spiritual” on Sundays by the owner of a well-known Irish pub in downtown Minneapolis. “Something low-key and casual, that people could enjoy without having things shoved down their throats,” was how Paul Kyle recalled the job description.

-Big News Network.


Bishops Protest

ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO. Nine conservative Bishops from the Anglican Church of Canada have denounced the church’s new policy affirming “the integrity, and sanctity of committed, adult same-sex relationships.” -Big News Network.

Making Amends

In the early sixteenth century, groups of European Christians started splitting from the Roman Catholic Church in what is now known as the Protestant Reformation. But while Protestants and Catholics were at odds, they had one thing in common: Anabaptism had to be eliminated. The reformed Christians drowned Felix Manx, the first of thousands of Anabaptist Martyrs, over the next two centuries. The Catholics burned at the stake Michael Sattler, author of the first Anabaptist confession of faith. Even Martin Luther, who is credited with ushering in the Reformation, urged the execution of all Anabaptists as heretics. But now, nearly 500 years later, the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches—the primary antagonists of Anabaptists in the 16th and 17th centuries—are seeking to make amends. -RNS.

Only the Alpha and the Omega of human history; the author of creation and redemption, could describe so minutely the events of the Christian era. The man of Galilee, who claimed to have existed before Abraham, and who professed unity with the father, stands justified by the fulfillment of his predictions. Likewise, the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are guaranteed as truth by his divine endorsement.

Here then is our desired shortcut for solving life’s riddle. Christ and the Scriptures he inspired constitute “the way, the truth, and the life.” Here is a physician with a remedy that works! 

TO and FRO with the Editor

Question:

What was God trying to do when he was destroying the world in Noah's time? I do not understand how he wanted to destroy sin, while preserving the sin problem in the ark.

O.J.

Answer:

Genesis 6:1-6 sets out the theological justification for the flood. We are told that human wickedness was so extreme that God was filled with pain because of it. He decided to wipe out Man from the earth—but, Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of the Lord.

This story is one of many in Genesis, which tell of divine judgement tempered by divine grace. The theme is introduced in Genesis three, where the serpent is cursed and the woman's victory over it foreshadowed. In chapter four, Cain's punishment is unbearable, it is accompanied by God's kindness. The eleventh chapter sees the imaginings and strivings of a godless world foiled by God's judgment upon it. But then, God chooses Abram, and the long story of grace's triumph over judgement goes on.

The flood was not God's attempt to exterminate evil, but a judgment to check its progress. It was judgment with high purpose—namely: the preservation of the message of grace through Noah. In the gospel, Christ does not save by the immediate elimination of evil; he begins its final eradication by himself suffering under evil, and God's judgment upon it.

Question:

When does a person become a sinner?

D.W.

Answer:

The Bible indicates that sin is a problem that goes much further than mere guilt per misdeed. Scripture bears witness to what is everywhere apparent: human nature is compromised; we know good but seek to do evil. The problem is that human beings are destitute of the love for God which sums up the fundamental requirement in God's reign, in his universe. Every person wishes that this law might somehow permit an exception in his case. "*The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law*" (Romans 8:7).

The generic proportions of the sin problem are stated in terms of the Hebrew concept of corporate personality. Therefore the sin of Adam—federal head of the human race—had consequences for all his descendants (Romans 5:12). "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

Scripture also teaches that there are degrees of guilt. "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded*" (Luke 12:48). "*Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of the greater sin*" (Luke 19:11). The infant knows little and is therefore less accountable. The more one knows of God and duty, the more responsible one becomes; the more guilty is

he/she that rebels. For this reason the greatest sin in the Bible is the sin of refusing to believe in the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation*" (Hebrews 2:3). To answer your question directly: we enter upon the universal problem of sin at birth. We go on to become sinners in practice.

Question:

What Scriptures in the Old Testament point to a Messiah that would suffer and die for the sins of the world? How is it that the Jews do not see such a messiah in their Tanakh. What are they misreading?

S.K.

Answer:

I do not think anyone could ever have fore-imagined the kind of Messiah that Jesus is. The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly describe Jesus of Nazareth. Christian commentators have said that the Old Testament is the New Testament 'concealed.' Which is to say that the passion of Christ is hinted or foreshadowed, but not telegraphed in any precise way. According to 1 Peter 1:10-12, saintly persons in Judaism of old, had to peer into the future, "*searching intently with greatest care,*" seeking to understand the things God's Spirit inspired them to say and write.

If a suffering Messiah is not definitively anticipated in the Old Testament, certainly he is in principle. The notion of redemption through vicarious ordeal is present in Isaiah 53, which describes the suffering Servant who bears the woundedness of his people and 'justifies many.' In context, the Servant is a faithful remnant of Israel. From our vantage point, this far from the events of Scripture, it is easy to see how the Christians saw Jesus in this chapter.

One of Jesus' trademark sayings was, "*He who has ears, let him hear.*" I take this to mean that Christ and his gospel came into the world as a challenge and an opportunity for the exercise of faith. Part of the reason why so many Jews did not accept Jesus as their Messiah was because he left that option wide open to them. They did not *have* to believe on the basis of a glaringly obvious fulfilment of Scripture. His presence among them was a test. He was set for "*the fall and rising again of many in Israel.*" Those who genuinely sought to please God found enough evidence in Jesus himself to convince them of his identity. "*If anyone chooses to do God's will he will find out whether my teaching comes from God, or whether I speak on my own*" (John 7:17).

The Christian perspective is this: we do not read Jesus by reading the Old Testament. We read the Old Testament by Jesus. Those who crucified Jesus insisted that the Messiah must answer to the Law. They made the Law greater than Christ (John 19:7). The starting point for detecting the suffering Messiah in the ancient Scriptures, is at the place of faith in Jesus.

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WILL YOU WILL?

Nearly two million people die in the USA every year without leaving a will. Approximately 600,000 of these are evangelical Christians. In the majority of cases, they were good Christian stewards in life. But they made no provision to continue their stewardship after death. They left their lifetime savings for court distribution. While alive, they would never have sanctioned the decisions on distribution made by the court.

None of us will die any sooner for making legal provision for the final allocation of our goods. These are goods God has loaned us. Legal provision should not be delayed for even a day, especially now, when the making of a will can be both simple and inexpensive.

If you have not already done so, will you pray and act on this matter of a will, or a living trust? Will you remember the work of the gospel, that others may come to share the eternal life in which you now rejoice? It is within your power to make provision that some find the treasure to which our Lord referred (Matthew 13:44). That gospel treasure illuminates the shadows of death, points to the everlasting gates of pearl, and reveals a welcoming savior (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

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